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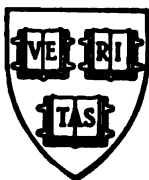
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MR. JERVIS

BY

B. M. CROKER

AUTHOR OF

"A THIRD PERSON," "TWO MASTERS," "A FAMILY LEHENESS,"
"INTERFERENCE," ETC.



PHILADELPHIA

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1895

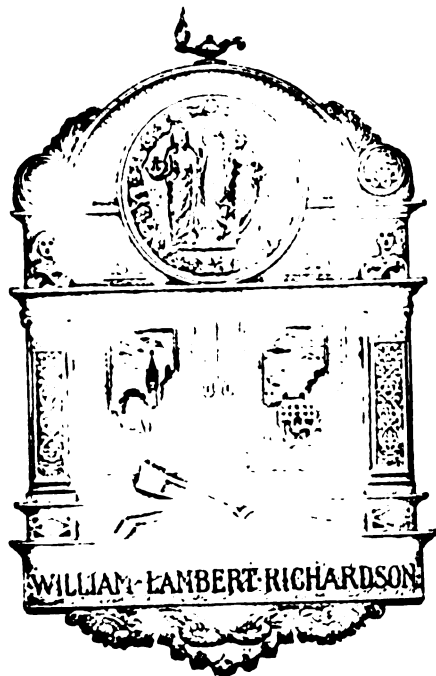
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MR. JERVIS.

CHAPTER I.

A GIRL IN A THOUSAND.

"I suppose I must write and say she may come. Personally, I shall be delighted to have her, but I'm afraid Granby will think a girl in the house rather a bore. There is such an awkward number in India!"

"And sometimes in other places," added a lady who sat on the fender-stool blowing a great wood fire with a preposterously small pair of bellows.

"You know what I mean, Milly," retorted her companion, a handsome, indolent-looking woman, who reclined in an easy-chair, with an open letter in her lap. "Houses out here are only built for two, as a rule, especially in cantonments. A victoria or a pony-cart holds but two, and two is a much more manageable number for dinners and tiffins. Still, I shall be glad to have a girl to chaperon; it will give me an object in life, and more interest in going out."

"Could you take more?" asked the lady with the bellows, casting a sly smile over her shoulder.

"To be sure I could, you disagreeable little creature! When a woman is no longer quite young, and her days of romance are at end, the hopes and prospects of a pretty companion give her another chance in the matrimonial lucky-bag,—a chance at second-hand, but still sufficiently exciting. Alas! life after a certain age is like a bottle of flat soda-water."

"I don't think so," rejoined the lady with the bellows, stoutly.

"No; I should be surprised if you did. You are so sympathetic and energetic. You throw yourself heart and soul into Dorcas meetings, bazaars, nurse-tending, and other people's joys or afflictions. Now, my sympathies and energies rarely extend beyond Granby and myself; I am becoming torpid, I can scarcely get up the steam for a ball, even the prospect of cutting out old mother Brande fails to rouse me. However, when I have a charming niece to marry—and to marry well—things will assume a different aspect. How amusing it will be to eclipse the other girls and their scheming mothers! how gratifying to see all the best *partis* in the place grovelling at her feet,—her triumphs will be mine!" And Mrs. Langrishe slowly closed her heavy eyelids, and appeared—judging from her expression—to be wrapped in some beatific vision. From this delicious contemplation she was abruptly recalled by the prosaic question,—

"How old is she?"

"Let me see; dear, dear me! Yes," sitting erect and opening her fine eyes to their widest extent, "why, strictly between ourselves, she must be twenty-six. How time flies! She is my eldest brother's daughter, one of a large family. Fanny, my sister in Calcutta, had her out eighteen months ago, and now she is obliged to go home, and wants to hand Lalla over to me!"

"I understand," assented her listener, with a sagacious nod.

"Can you also understand that simply because Fanny and I have no children of our own, our people seem to expect us to provide for their olive-branches? I don't quite see it myself, though I do send them my old dresses. Now let me read you my letter," unfolding it as she spoke.

"450. CROWNINGHEE, Feb. 22.

"DEAREST IDA,—The doctors here say that Richard must positively go home at once. He has been out too long, and it is quite time that another member of the firm took a turn in the East. He has been working hard, and it is essential for him to have a complete holiday, and I must accompany him, a step for which I was quite unprepared. I have taken a house at Simla for the season; that I can easily relet and get off my hands, but what am I to do with dear little Lalla?

"The poor child only came out last cold weather year, and cannot endure the idea of leaving India; and no wonder, with any number of admirers, and a box of new dresses just landed by the mail steamer. I had intended giving her such a gay season, and sending Dick home alone; but now all my nice little schemes have been knocked on the head. How soon a few days, even a few hours, out here alters all one's plans! And now, to come to the gist of my letter, will you take Lalla? I would not trust her with any one but her own aunt, though I know that Mrs. Monty-Kute is dying to have her. You will find her a most amusing companion; no one could be dull with Lalla in the house. She is a pretty girl, and will do you credit, and is certain to be the belle of the place. She has rather a nice little voice, plays the banjo and guitar, and dances like a professional. As to her disposition, nothing in this world is capable of ruffling her serene temper. I cannot think who she takes after, for it is not a *family* trait. I have never once seen her put out, and that is more than can be said for a girl in a thousand. In fact, she is a girl in a thousand. I can send her to you with a lovely outfit, a new habit and saddle, and her pony, if you wish. I am sure, dear, you will receive her if you can possibly manage it; and do your best to get her well *settled*, for you know poor Eustace has Charlotte and Sophy now quite grown up; even May is eighteen. You are so clever, so popular, so full of sense, dearest Ida, so superior to my stupid self, that if you do consent to take Lalla under your wing, her fortune is practically made. We have engaged passages in the *Paramatta*, which sails on the twelfth, so write by return of post to

"Your loving sister,

"FANNY CRAWFORD."

"Fanny is quite right," said Mrs. Langrishe, with a slight tinge of contempt in her tone. "She is by no

means clever; just an impulsive, good-natured goose, without a scrap of tact, and taken in and imposed on on all sides. I won't have the pony, that is positive, and gram ten seers for the rupee."

"Then you have quite decided to take the young lady?" exclaimed her companion, incredulously.

"Yes," now leaning back, and clasping two long white hands behind her head. "Pretty, amusing, accomplished, good-tempered,—I don't see *how* I can possibly say no this time, though hitherto I have steadily set my face against having out one of my nieces; I have always said it was dreadfully unfair to Granby; however, this niece is actually stranded in the country, and it would look so odd if I declined; besides, I shall like to have her; we shall mutually benefit one another. She will amuse me, rejuvenate me, be useful in the house, arrange flowers, write notes, read to me, dust the ornaments, make coffee and salad, and do all sorts of little odd jobs, and ultimately cover me with glory by making the match of the season!"

"And on your part,—what is to be your *rôle*?"

"I will give her a charming home; I will have all the best men at the house, and I will take her everywhere; give her, if necessary, a couple of smart new ball-dresses and that too delicious opera-mantle that has grown too small for me."

"Or you too large for it—which?" inquired Mrs. Sladen, with a slight elevation of her eyebrows.

"Milly, how odious you can be!"

"And about Major Langrishe?" continued Milly, unabashed.

"Oh, Granby will be all right; but I must write to Fanny by this post and say that I shall be delighted to have Lalla. Pour out the tea like a good little creature whilst I scribble a line; the *dák* goes down at six."

The other lady, who had kindled the fire and was now

making tea, was not, as might be supposed, the mistress of the house, but merely an old friend who had dropped in for a chat this cold March afternoon. She was a slight, delicate-looking woman, with dark hair, dark eyes, and numerous lines on her thin, careworn face, though she was barely thirty. No one ever dreamt of calling Mrs. Sladen pretty, but most women voted her "a darling," and all men "a little brick." Married in her teens, before she knew her own mind (but when her relations had thoroughly made up theirs), to an elderly eligible, she had become from the hour she left the altar the slave of a selfish, irascible husband, whose mental horizon was bordered by two tables,—the dinner-table and the card-table,—and whose affections were entirely centred in his own portly person. Milly Fraser's people were on the eve of quitting India, they were poor, they had a large and expensive family at home, otherwise they might have hesitated before giving their pretty Milly (she *was* pretty in those days) to a man more than double her age, notwithstanding that he was drawing good pay and his widow would enjoy a pension. They would have discovered, had they made enquiries, that he was heavily in debt to the banks, that he could not keep a friend or a servant, and that, after all, poor young Hastings, of the staff corps, whom they had so ruthlessly snubbed, would have made a more satisfactory son-in-law. Mrs. Sladen had two little girls in England, whom her heart yearned over,—little girls being brought up among strangers at a cheap suburban school. How often had her husband solemnly promised that "next year she should go home and see the children!" but, when the time came, he invariably hardened his heart, like Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and would not let her go. If she went, who was to manage the house and servants and see after his dinner and his comforts? *He* was not going to be left in the hands of a Khansamah! And,

moreover, where was the money for her passage to come from? he had not a rupee to spare (for her).

Colonel Sladen was a shrewd man when his own interests were concerned. He was alive to the fact that he was not popular, but that things were made pleasant to him all round for the sake of the unfortunate lady whom he married, and bullied, and drove with a tongue like the lash of a slaver's whip. Yes, if she went home it would make a vast difference in his comfort, socially and physically,—many a rude rebuff she had saved him, many a kindness was done to him for her sake, and many a woman fervently thanked her good genius that she was not his wife. In spite of her uncongenial partner, Mrs. Sladen managed to be cheerful and generally bright and smiling, ready to nurse the sick, to decorate the club for dances, to help girls to compose ball-dresses, to open her heart to all their troubles, and to give them sympathy and sound advice. "Oh, do not marry a man simply because your people wish it," she might have said, but she never did, "and merely because he is considered a good match; far better to go home and earn your bread as a shop-assistant, or even a slavey,—take a lesson from my fate!"

Mrs. Langrishe, on the other hand, ruled her dear Granby with a firm but gracious sway. Their match had been made in England, and had proved in one respect a severe and mutual disappointment,—well, "disappointment" is an ugly word; shall we say "surprise"? Captain Langrishe had been attracted by Ida Pask's handsome face, stately deportment, and magnificent toilettes. He was impressed by her superb indifference to money,—rumour endowed her with a large income, and rumour had no real grounds for this agreeable assertion. Ida was one of a numerous family, was good-looking, self-reliant, ambitious, and eight-and-twenty. Her dresses were unpaid for, and her face was her

fortune. She, on her part, believed the insignificant-looking little officer, whose pale profile looked exactly as if it were cut out of a deal board, to be enormously rich. He, too, affected to despise outlay, and kept hunters, and talked of his yacht. He was going to India immediately, and the wedding was hurried on; but long ere the happy pair had reached Bombay they had discovered the real state of affairs. He knew that his bride was penniless, and she was aware that the hunters had been hired, the yacht had been a loan, and that three hundred a year, besides his pay, was the utmost limit of her husband's purse. They were a wise couple, and made the best of circumstances; and by-and-by Captain Langrishe came to the conclusion that he had got hold of a treasure, after all. His Ida was full of tact and worldly wisdom, and possessed administrative powers of the highest order; she understood the art of keeping up appearances, and laid to her heart that scriptural text which says, "As long as thou doest well unto thyself men will speak well of thee." She ensured her husband a comfortable home, studied his tastes, flattered his weaknesses, was always serene, affectionate, and well dressed. Her dinners were small but celebrated, her *entrées* and savouries a secret between her cook and herself; she did not dispense indiscriminate hospitalities,—no, she merely entertained a few important officials, smart women, and popular men, who would be disposed to noise abroad the fame of her dainty feasts and to pay her back again with interest. Shabby people and insignificant acquaintances never saw the interior of her abode, which was the embodiment of comfort and taste. Her dresses were well chosen and costly; diamonds sparkled on her fingers and on her neck; and, though but till recently a captain's wife, her air and manner of calm self-approval was such that the wives of higher officials meekly accepted her at her own value.

tion, and frequently suffered her to thrust them into the background and usurp their place. Such was her ability that people took the cue from her, and valued an invitation to afternoon tea with Mrs. Langrishe far above an elaborate dinner with less exclusive hostesses.

Neither the furious attacks of her enemies (and she had not a few) nor the occasional indiscretions of her friends ever ruffled the even temperament of this would-be "grande dame." It was an astonishing but patent fact that she invariably occupied, so to speak, a chief seat; that she was always heralded on her arrival at a station, met, entertained, and regretfully sped. Whilst ladies as worthy languished in the dâk-bungalow and drove in rickety ticsa gharries, she had the carriages of rajahs at her disposal, and was overwhelmed with attentions and invitations. Surely all this was amply sufficient to make these women "talk her over" and hold her at arms' length. Men who knew Captain Langrishe's resources marvelled amongst themselves and said, "Gran has very little besides his pay, how the deuce does he do it? Look at his wife's dresses; and they give the best dinners in the place; there will be a fine smash there some day." But years rolled on, and there was no sign of any such crisis. The truth was that Granby Langrishe had married an exceedingly able woman, a woman who thoroughly understood the art of genteel pushing and personal advertisement. She had persistently edged, yea, driven her husband to the front, and he now enjoyed an excellent appointment at the price of the two dewy tears that stood in his Ida's expressive eyes when bemoaning his bad luck to an influential personage. The Langrishes were now drawing two thousand rupees a month, and were held in corresponding esteem.

Mrs. Langrishe does not look forty; far from it. She has taken excellent care of herself,—no early rising, no mid-day visiting, for this wise matron. She is tall, with

a fine figure, alas! getting somewhat stout; her brows are straight and pencilled; beneath them shine a pair of effective gray eyes; her features are delicately cut. If her face has a fault it is that her jaw is a *little* too square. Whatever people may say of Ida Langrishe, they cannot deny that she is remarkably handsome, and as clever as she is handsome. As a spinster she had not been entirely successful in her own aims, but it would go hard if, with her brains, her circle of acquaintances and her valuable experience, she did not marry her niece brilliantly.

CHAPTER II.

"TELL ME ALL THE NEWS."

THE French windows of Mrs. Langrishe's charming drawing-room opened into a deep stone veranda embowered in honeysuckle and passion-flowers, and commanded a matchless view, irrespective of the foreground, in which Mrs. Sladen's rickshaw is the chief feature, or the gravel sweep, grass garden, and beds of pale wintry roses; but beyond the pine-clad hills, among which red roofs are peeping, beyond the valley of rhododendrons, and a bold purple range, behold the snows,—a long, long barrier to the everlasting hills, to such as the eyes of the palmist had never been lifted. People may whisper that they were disappointed in the Taj, that Delhi was a delusion, and the marble rocks a snare, but who can declare that the snows were beneath his expectations? And if he were to say so, who would be found to believe him? The evening breeze is raw and chill; it has travelled sixty miles from those icy slopes; it creeps up the Khud, and warns the shivering roses that the sun

has set. It stirs the solemn deodars as they stand in dark outline against the sky.

Mrs. Langrishe, rising from her writing-table, letter in hand, sweeps back to her friend, who is again sitting on the fender-stool, staring into the fire, thinking, perchance, of those bygone days, when *she* was a girl whose friends were anxious to get her settled.

"Milly," said her hostess, "you are passing the post-office, and you can post this for me; you had better go now, dear, as you know you have had a sore throat, and it is getting late."

Mrs. Sladen rose at once; she was accustomed to being sent on errands, and to being made use of by her intimates. She pulled on her cheap gloves, twisted her stringy boa round her neck, and held out her hand for the letter that was to bring Miss Paske to Shirani. As her friend stooped and kissed her, she looked up at her wistfully, and said,—

"Ida, if this girl comes to you, you won't think of her only as a marketable article, will you? You will allow her to marry—if she does marry—to please herself, won't you, dear?"

"You silly, romantic little person!" exclaimed the other, patting her cheek with two solid taper fingers. "What an absurd question! as if any girl is ever married against her will in these enlightened days!"

Mrs. Sladen made no answer beyond an involuntary sigh. She went out to the veranda, and got into her rickshaw without another word, and ere she was whirled away, nodded a somewhat melancholy farewell to her handsome, prosperous-looking friend, who, clad in a rich tea-gown, had framed herself for a moment in the open door-way, and called out imperiously,—

"The post goes at six,—you have just ten minutes." Then, with a shiver, Mrs. Langrishe closed the French window and returned to her comfortable fireside. "Poor

Milly!" she muttered, as she warmed one well-shod foot. "She was always odd and sentimental. Marry to please herself,—yes, by all means; but she must also marry to please me!"

* * * * *

A rickshaw (the popular conveyance in the Himalayan hill-stations) is a kind of glorified Bath-chair or grown-up perambulator, light and smart, and drawn and pushed by four men; it flies along flat roads and down hills as rapidly as a pony-cart, especially if your Jampannis are racing another team.

Mrs. Sladen's rickshaw was old; the hood, of cheap American leather, was cracked and blistered; it had a list to one side, and her Jampannis wore the shabby clothes of last year; but, then, their mistress did the same! As they dashed down hill, they nearly came into collision with a smart Dyke's cee-sprung vehicle, and a quartette of men in brilliant (Ricketts) blue and yellow liveries. The rickshaw contained an elderly lady of ample proportions, with flaxen hair, and a good-humoured handsome face, surmounting two chins. This was Mrs. Brande, the wife of Pelham Brande, Esq., a distinguished member of the Civil Service.

"Kubbardar, kubbardar!—take care, take care!" she shrieked. Then to Mrs. Sladen, "My gracious! how you do fly! but you are a light-weight. Well, come alongside of me, my dear, and tell me all the news. This place is as dull as ditch-water, so few people here. Next year I shan't come up so early."

"I believe every house is taken," said Mrs. Sladen, cheerfully, as they rolled along side by side. "Even the Cedars, and the Monastery, and Haddon Hall."

"You don't say so! The chimneys smoke beyond anything. I pity whoever is going there."

"A bachelor, I believe,—a Captain Waring,—has taken it for the season, as it's close to the mess."



"In the regiment that's marching up,—the Scorpions?"

"No; I believe he is out of the service and coming up for the hot weather, and to try and get some shooting in Thibet later on."

"Then he must have money?" wagging her head sagaciously.

"Yea, I dare say he has. I'm told it is going to be a gay season."

"That's what they always say," replied Mrs. Brande, impatiently. "I'll believe it when I see it. But I did hear that Mrs. Kane is expecting a brother that is a baronet; he's coming up to see the hills, he has been globe-trotting all winter. And so you have been up with the Duchess. She's all alone, isn't she?"

"Yea, for the present; but she will soon have a niece with her,—a niece from Calcutta."

"A niece!" sharply, and leaning half out of the rickshaw. "What niece?"

"Her brother's daughter, Miss Paske. She is said to be very pretty and accomplished, and attractive in every way."

"You need not tell me *that*!" in accents of concentrated contempt. "Is Mrs. Langrishe the woman to saddle herself with an ugly girl? She'll be having grand parties now; all the rich young fellows, and the *Baronet*,—no poor subalterns, you'll see,—and she will get her off her hands in no time. Just the sort of thing she will like, and a fine excuse for having packs of men dangling about the house."

"Oh, Mrs. Brande, you know that is not her style," expostulated her companion.

"Well, well, she is your friend,—a school-fellow, too,—though you must have been in the infant-school, so I'll say no more; but you know I am not double-faced, and I cannot abide her, and her airs, and her schemes, and her always pushing herself to the front, and sitting in

the general's pew, and being the first to ask that Austrian prince to dinner, and getting up at parties and sailing out before the commissioner's wife,—such impudence!—and people put up with her. If poor little Mrs. Jones was to do such things—and she has a better right, being an honourable's daughter—I'd like to know what would be said? But there's no fear of Mrs. Jones; there's no brass about *her*." And Mrs. Brande gave a bounce that made the cee-springs quiver.

"Now, Mrs. Brande, you forget that Ida is my friend."

"Aye, and better be her friend than her enemy. Well, here is my turn, and here we part." And with a valedictory wave of her podgy hand, in another instant Mrs. Brande was thundering down the narrow road that led to the best house in Shirani—her own comfortable, hospitable dwelling.

Mrs. Sladen posted her letter and went on to the club and reading-room, a long, low building overlooking a series of terraces and tennis-courts, and the chief resort of the whole station. As she entered the gate she encountered an elderly gentleman with beetling brows, a coarse gray moustache, and a portly figure, riding a stout black pony.

"Been looking for you everywhere," he bellowed; "where the mischief have you been? Swilling tea as usual, I suppose? Soper and Rhodes are coming to take 'pot luck,' so go home at once; and, I say, I hear there is fish at Manookjee's, just come up; call in on your way, and fetch it in the rickshaw."

Exit Colonel Sladen to his evening rubber; exit Mrs. Sladen to carry home much-travelled fish, and possibly to cook the chief portion of the dinner.

CHAPTER III.

"OTHER PEOPLE HAS NIECES TOO."

Mrs. SLADEN had not only given Mrs. Brande a piece of news, she had introduced her to a grand idea,—an idea that took root, and grew, and flourished, in that lady's somewhat empty mind, as she sat alone in her drawing-room over a pleasant wood fire, which she shared impartially with a sleek self-conscious fox-terrier.

All the world admitted that once upon a time "old Mother Brande" must have been a beautiful woman. Even now her fair skin, blue eyes, and chiselled features entitled her to rank as a highly-respectable wreck. Who would have thought that refined, fastidious, cynical Pelham Brande would have married the niece of a lodging-house keeper? Perhaps if he had anticipated the career which lay before him—how unexpectedly and supremely successful he was to be, how the fierce light inseparable from high places was to beat upon his fair-haired Sarella—he might have hesitated ere he took such a rash and romantic step. Little did he suppose that his fair-haired Sally, who had waited so capably on him, would one day herself be served by gorgeous scarlet-clad government Chuprassis; or that she was bound to walk out of a room before the wives of generals and judges, and that she would have a "position" to maintain! But who is as wise at two-and-twenty as he is at fifty-two? At two-and-twenty, Pelham Brande had just passed for the India Civil Service, and was lodging in London; and whilst preparing for the Bar he got typhoid fever and very nearly died. He was carefully tended

by Mrs. Batt, his landlady, and her lovely niece, Sarella, who was as fair as a June rose and as innocent as a March lamb.

The best medical authorities assure us that nothing is so conducive to convalescence as a skilful and pretty nurse, and under the influence of Sara's ministrations Mr. Brande made rapid progress towards recovery but fell a victim to another malady, which proved incurable. He did not ask his relations for permission or advice, but married his bride one morning at St. Clement Danes, took a week's trip to Dover and two first-class passages to Bombay.

As a rule, junior civilians are despatched without ruth to lonely jungle districts, where they never see another white face for weeks, and their only associates are their native subordinates, their staff of domestics, and the simple dwellers in the neighbouring villages. Now and then they may chance on an opium official or a forest officer, and exchange cheroots and newspapers, but these meetings are rare. After a busy University career, after an immense strain on the mental faculties necessary to passing a severe examination, the dead sameness of that life, the silence and loneliness of the jungle (aggravated by the artless prattle of the office Baboo), is enough to unhinge the strongest mind. Miles and miles from the haunts of his countrymen, from books and telegrams, and the stir and excitement of accustomed associations, the plunge from the roar of the London streets, and life at high pressure, to the life in a solitary up-country district, is indeed a desperate one; especially if the new-comer's eyes and ears are not open to the great book of Nature,—if he sees no beauty in stately peepul-trees, tracts of waving grain, venerable temples, and splendid sunsets; if he does not care to beat for pig or shoot the thirsty snipe, but merely sits in his tent door in the cool of the evening, his labours o'er, and languishes for polo,

cards, and theatres. Then he may well curse his lot; he is undeniably in a bad way.

Pelham Brande had nothing to fear from loneliness or ennui. Sara made him an excellent helpmate. She picked up the language and customs with surprising facility; she proved a capital housekeeper, and as shamelessly hard at a bargain as any old native hag. But she never took to books or to the letter "h." For years the Brandes lived in out-of-the-way districts and insignificant stations, until by slow degrees his services and abilities conducted him to the front. As advancing time promoted him, his wife declined in looks and increased in bulk, and her tastes and eccentricities became fixed. Pelham was not actually ashamed of his partner, but he was alive to the fact that with a cultivated gentlewoman at the head of his establishment he would have occupied a vastly more agreeable social position; but he never admitted—what his friends loudly affirmed—that, as he sat opposite to Sara day after day, he was also sitting face to face with the one great mistake of his life.

Twice he had taken her to Australia for six months, but never (nor did she desire it) to her native land. Once, years ago, he ran home himself, and was received by his relations, as relations generally welcome a wealthy, childless, and successful man! They even brought themselves to ask, somewhat timidly, for Sara; and she, on her part, sent them generous consignments of curry powder, red pepper, and her own special and far-famed brand of chutney. The good lady had not many resources beyond house-keeping. She read the daily paper, and now and then a society novel, if it was plentifully peopled with lords and ladies; she could write an ordinary note, invitation, or refusal, and a letter (with a dictionary beside her). She was fond of her cows and poultry, and adored her dog Ben; gave excellent but

desperately dull dinners; dressed sumptuously in gorgeous colours; enjoyed a gossip; loved a game of whist and hated Mrs. Langrishe. She lived a monotonous and harmless life, vibrating between the hills and plains each season with clockwork regularity.

As Mrs Brande sat before her fire and watched the crackling pine-wood, she was not happy. Officially, she was the chief lady of the place, the "Burra mem sahib;" but clever Mrs. Langrishe was the real leader of society, and bore away all the honours,—the kornel, so to speak, of distinction,—leaving her but the miserable shell. With a young and pretty girl as her companion, she would be more insufferable and more sought after than ever. As it was, she, Sara Brande, could make but little stand against her; and once her enemy was allied to a charming and popular niece, she might figuratively lay down her arms and die. She was a friendless, desolate old woman. If her little Annie had lived it would have been different; and she had no belongings, no nieces. No; but—happy thought!—Pelham had no less than three, who were poor, and, by all accounts, pretty. He had helped their mother, his sister, to educate them: he sent them money now and then. Why should she not adopt one of these girls, and have a niece also? Yes, she would write herself; she would speak to Pelham that very evening after dinner (it was his favourite dinner). The more she became accustomed to the idea, as she turned it over in her mind, the more she was filled with delight, resolve, and anticipation. The girl's route, steamer, room, dresses, were already chosen, and she was in the act of selecting her future husband, when Mr. Brande entered, cold, briak, and hungry.

After dinner, when Mr. Brande was smoking a cigarette, his artful wife opened the subject next to her heart, and remarked, as she handed him a cup of fragrant coffee,—

"Pelham, you are often away on tour, are you not? and I feel uncommon lonely, I can tell you. I am not as active or as cheerful as I used to be. I'm too old for dancing, and tennis, and riding. Not that I ever was much hand at them."

"Well, do you want to come on tour, or shall I buy you a pony or hire you a companion?" inquired Mr. Brande, facetiously,—a clean-shaven, gray-haired man, with thin, mobile lips, keen eyes, and at a little distance a singularly boyish appearance. "What would you like to do?"

"I should like to ride and dance by proxy," was the unexpected answer. "Let us ask out one of those Gordon girls, your nieces. I'd be very good to her, and you know, Pel, I'm a lonely creature, and if our own little Annie had lived I would not be wanting to borrow another woman's daughter to keep me company."

Mr. Brande was surveying his wife with a severely judicial expression; it relaxed as she spoke of their only child, buried far away under a tamarind-tree on the borders of Nepal.

Yes, their little Annie would have been five-and-twenty had she lived, and doubtless as lovely as Sally Batt, who had turned his head, mitigated his success, and whom he rarely repented of having married.

"Your sister has three girls," she continued, "and she is badly off. What is the pension of a colonel's widow? Why, less than some folks give their cooks."

"It is not considerable, certainly, and Carrie finds it hard to make both ends meet; she never was much of a manager. But, Sally, a girl is a great responsibility, and you are not accustomed to young people."

"No; but I can learn to study them, for I'm fond of them. Say yes, Pel, and I'll write. We will pay her passage, of course, and I'll meet her myself at Allahabad."

Mr. Brande tossed the end of his cigarette into the fire, fixed his eye-glass firmly in his eye, and contemplated his wife in silence. At last he said,—

"May I ask what has put this idea into your head all of a sudden?"

"It's not—exactly—sudden," she stammered; "I've often a sort of lonely feel, but I must truthfully say that I never thought of your niece till to-day, when I heard that Mrs. Langrishe is getting up one of hers from Calcutta."

Mr. Brande jerked the glass hastily on to his waistcoat and gave a peculiarly long whistle.

"I see. And you are not going to be beaten by Mrs. Langrishe; you mean to run an opposition girl, and try which will have the best dresses, the most partners, and be married first? No, no, Sally. I utterly refuse to lend myself to such a scheme, or to allow one of Carrie's daughters to enter for that sort of competition." And he crossed his legs and took another cigarette.

"But listen to me, Pel," rising as she spoke; "I declare to you that I won't do what you say, and, anyway, your niece will be in quite a different position to the Langrishe's girl. I'll be as good to her as if she was my own,—I will, indeed," and her voice trembled with eagerness. "I'm easy to get on with; look how long I keep my servants," she pleaded. "These Gordons are your nearest kin; you ought to do something for them. I suppose they will come in for all your money. Your sister is delicate, and if anything happened to her you'd have to take, not one girl, but the whole three. How would you like that? Now, if one of them was nicely married she would make a home for her sisters."

"You are becoming quite an orator, and there is something in what you say. Well, I'll think it over and let you know to-morrow, Sally. As to leaving them my money, I'm only fifty-two, and I hope to live to

spend a good slice of it myself." And then Mr Brande took up a literary paper and affected to be absorbed in its contents. But, although he had the paper before him, he was not reading: he was holding counsel with himself.

He had not seen Carrie's girls since they counted their ages in double figures; they were his nearest of kin, were very poor, and led dull lives in an out-of-the-way part of the world. Yes, he ought to do something, and it would please the old lady to give her a companion, and a pretty, fresh young face about the house would not be disagreeable to himself. But what would a refined and well-educated English girl think of her aunt, with her gaudy dresses, bad grammar, mania for precedence, and brusque, unconventional ways? Well, one thing was certain, she would soon discover that she had a generous hand and a kind heart.

The next morning, Mr. Brande, having duly slept on the project, gave his consent and a cheque, and Mrs. Brande was so dazzled with her scheme, and so dazed with all she had to think of, that she added up her bazaar account wrong and gave the cook a glass of vinegar in mistake for sherry, which same had a fatal effect on an otherwise excellent pudding.

In order to compose her letter comfortably and without distraction, Mrs. Brande shut herself up in her own room, with writing materials and dictionary, and told the bearer to admit no one, not even Mrs. Sladen. After two rough copies and two hours' hard labour, the important epistle was finished and addressed, and as Mrs. Brande stamped it with a firm hand, she said to herself aloud,—

"I do trust Ben won't be jealous. I hope he will like her."

Being mail-day, Mrs. Brande took it to the post herself, and as she turned from dropping it into the box,

she met her great rival coming up the steps, escorted by two men. Mrs. Langrishe was always charming to her enemy, because it was bad style to quarrel, and she knew that her pretty phrases and pleasing smiles infuriated the other lady to the last degree, and she said, as she cordially offered a neatly-gloved hand,—

"How do you *do*?—I have not seen you for ages! I know it's my business to call, as I came up last; but, really, I have so many engagements and such tribes of visitors——"

"Oh, pray don't apologise!" cried Mrs. Brande, reddening. "I'd quite forgotten,—I really thought you *had* called!" (May Sara Brande be forgiven for this terrible falsehood!)

It was now Mrs. Langrishe's turn to administer a little nip.

"Of course you are going to dine at the Maitland-Perrys' next week?" (well knowing that she had not been invited). "Every one who is *anybody* is to be there. There are not many up yet, it is so early; but it will be uncommonly smart—as far as it goes,—and given for the Baronet!"

"No, I am not going; I have not been asked," rejoined Mrs. Brande with a gulp. She generally spoke the truth, however much against the grain.

"Not asked! how very odd! Well," with a soothing smile, "I dare say they will have you at their next. I hear that we are to expect quite a gay season."

"And I was told that there will be no men."

"Really! That won't affect you much, as you don't ride or dance or go to picnics; but it is sad news for poor me, for I am expecting a niece up from Calcutta, and I hope the place will be lively."

"But I do mind, Mrs. Langrishe, just as much as you do," retorted the other, with a triumphant toss of her head. "Perhaps you may not be aware that I am ex-

pecting a niece too?" (How could Mrs. Langrishe possibly divine what the good lady herself had only known within the last few hours?) "Yours is from Calcutta, but mine is all the way from England!" And her glance inferred that the direct Europe importation was a very superior class of consignment; then she added, "Other people has nieces too, you see!" And with a magnificent bow she flounced down the steps, bundled into her rickshaw, and was whirled away.

Mrs. Langrishe stood watching the four blue and yellow Jampannis swiftly vanishing in a cloud of dust with a smile of malicious amusement.

"Other people has nieces too, you see!" turning to her companions with admirable mimicry. "She is not to be outdone! What fun it is! Cannot you fancy what she will be like—Mrs. Brande's niece, all the way from England? If not, I can inform you. She will have hair the colour of barley-sugar, clothes the colours of the rainbow, and not an 'h'!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE THREE YOUNG MAIDS OF HOYLE.

It was true that Mrs. Gordon and her daughters resided in a dull out-of-the-way part of the world; but they could not help themselves. They lived at Hoyle, in the first instance, because it was cheap, and, in the second place, because living at Hoyle had now become second nature to Mrs. Gordon, and nothing short of a fire or an earthquake could remove her.

Hoyle is in the south of England, within a stone's-throw of a shingly beach, and commands a full view of

the white shores of France. It is an old-fashioned hamlet, at least fifty years behind the age,—where the curfew is still sounded, the sight of an orange telegraph envelope is only interpreted as a messenger of death,—and is cut off from the bustling outer world by the great expanse of Romney Marsh. In deference to this *fin de siècle* age, a single line of rail crawls across the seaside desert, and once or twice a day a sleepy train stops just one mile short of the village. The village of Hoyle was once a chartered town, and was built many centuries before trains were invented. It was even out of the track of the lively stage-coaches, and owed its wealth and rise—and fall—entirely to its convenient proximity to the sea, its seclusion, its charming view of the opposite coast. Yes, its solid prosperity—low be it spoken—was due to smuggling. The High Street is lined by picturesque red-brick houses, which are occupied by the descendants of—shall we say sailors? a well-to-do, primitive, most respectable community, though from yonder upper window the present tenant's grandfather shot a preventive officer stone dead; and in the chimney of the next cottage (a most innocent-looking abode) three men who were in trouble lay concealed for a whole week. The capacious cellars of "The Cause is Altered" Inn were within living memory no strangers to bales of silk and casks of brandy.

Between the village and the inn there stands a solid old red house, with a small enclosed garden in front and a paved footpath leading to its mean little green hall door. The windows are narrow, the rooms irregular, and the ceilings absurdly low, but so is the rent. It suits its tenants admirably. It is warm, roomy, and cheap; it boasts of a fine walled garden at the rear, of acres of cellarage, and is known by the name of "Merry Meetings." This jovial designation is not of modern date, but points back to the grand old days when it was

the residence of the chief man in Hoyle, when it was club, bank, receiving-house, and fortress. Many were the carousals that took place in Mrs. Gordon's decent panelled parlour; to what grim tales and strange oaths have its walls given ear. There have been merry meetings of a much tamer description in the present time, when the maidens of the neighbourhood have gathered round the table and chattered and laughed over cups of honest tea, brewed in Mrs. Gordon's thin old silver teapot. Pretty girls have discussed dresses, tennis, and weddings, where formerly weather-beaten, bearded men assembled to celebrate the safe arrival of a newly-run cargo, and to appraise filmy laces, foreign silks, and cigars, and to quaff prime cognac and strange but potent waters.

The widow and her daughters have occupied "Merry Meetings" for fifteen years, ever since the death of Colonel Gordon. He had retired from the service and settled down near a garrison town, intending to turn his sword into a ploughshare; but in an evil moment he ventured his all in a tempting speculation, hoping thereby to double his income, but instead of which, alas! water came into the Wheal Rebecca and swept away every penny. Seeing nothing between him and the poor-house but a small pension, Colonel Gordon was not brave enough to face the situation, and died of a broken heart, though it was called a rapid decline, leaving his widow and three little girls to struggle with the future as best they could.

Colonel Gordon's connections were so furious with him for losing his money that they sternly refused to assist his widow, therefore she meekly collected the remains of the domestic wreck, and retired to Hoyle with her children and an old servant, who had strongly recommended her native place, where her "mistress could live in peace and quiet until she had time to turn herself

round and make plans." Mrs. Gordon took "Merry Meetings," which was partly furnished, for three months, and had remained there for fifteen years. Her plans were still undeveloped; she constantly talked of moving, but never got beyond that point. Occasionally she would say, "Well, girls, I really will give notice this term. We must move; we must decide something. I will write to a house agent. And, Honor, you need not mind getting the garden-seeds or having the kitchen whitewashed." But when to-morrow came these plans had melted into air, and the garden-seeds were set and the kitchen renovated as usual.

Mrs. Gordon was something of an invalid, and became more lethargic year by year, and a prey to an incurable habit of procrastination. She resigned her keys, purse, and authority into the hands of her eldest daughter, and contented herself with taking a placid interest in the garden, the weather, the daily paper, and sampling various new patent medicines. She still retained the remains of remarkable personal beauty and a fascination of manner that charmed all who came in contact with her, from the butcher's boy to the lord of the soil. People said that it was shamefully unfair to her girls the way in which Mrs. Gordon buried herself and them alive. She never made the smallest effort to better their lot, but contented herself with sitting all day in a comfortable easy-chair making gracious remarks, and looking handsome, stately, and languid.

Life was monotonous at "Merry Meetings." Two or three tennis parties in summer, two or three carpet dances in winter, now and then a day's shopping in Hastings, were events which were varied by long gray stretches of uneventful calm. The daily paper was a most welcome arrival, and the Miss Gordons entertained as eager an expectation of letters, of stirring news, of "something coming by the post," of "something hap-

pening," as if they lived in the midst of a large and busy community.

And what of the three Miss Gordons?

Jessie, the eldest, is twenty-six and quite surprisingly plain. She has pale eyes and a dark complexion, instead of dark eyes and a pale complexion; also a nose that would scarcely be out of place in a burlesque. She is clever, strong-willed, and practical, and manages the whole family with admirable tact, including Susan, the domestic treasure.

Jessie Gordon's name is well known as the author of pretty stories in girls' and children's magazines. She earns upwards of a hundred a year by her pen (which she generally adds to the common purse), and is regarded by her neighbours with a certain amount of pride, slightly tempered with uneasiness. Supposing she were to put some of her friends into a book! However, they criticise her work sharply to her face, make a great virtue of purchasing the magazines in which her tales appear, and magnify her merits, fame, and earnings to all outsiders.

Fairy, whose real name is Flora, comes next to Jessie in age. She is about two-and-twenty, and has a perfectly beautiful face,—a face to inspire poets and painters, faultless in outline, and illumined by a pair of pathetic blue eyes. A most delicate complexion—of which every care, reasonable or unreasonable, is taken—and quantities of fine sunny brown hair combine to complete a vision of loveliness. Yes, Fairy Gordon is almost startlingly fair to see, and seen seated at a garden-party or in a ball-room, all the strange men present instantly clamour for an introduction; and when it has been effected, and the marvellously pretty girl rises to dance, behold, she is a dwarf!—a poor little creature, with a shrill, harsh voice, and only four feet four inches in height. Her figure is deceptive, the body very long in proportion to the limbs.

Many and many a shock has Fairy administered to a would-be partner. Did she ever read their consternation in their faces? Apparently never; for no matter who remained at home, Fairy could not endure to miss an entertainment,—even a school feast or a children's party. It was an unwritten family law that Fairy must always come first, must always be shielded, petted, indulged, amused, and no one subscribed to this rule more readily than the second Miss Gordon herself. She was keenly alive to her own beauty, and talked frankly to her intimates of her charms; but she never once referred to her short stature, and her sisters but rarely alluded to the fact between themselves,—and then with bated breath. Even six inches would have made all the difference in the world; but four feet four was—well, remarkable. Of course the neighbours were accustomed to Fairy,—a too suggestive name. They remembered her quite a little thing, a lovely spoilt child, a child who had never grown up. She was still a little thing, and yet she was a woman,—a woman with a sharp tongue and a despotic temper. Fairy had true fairy-like fingers. She embroidered exquisitely, and made considerable sums doing church needlework, which sums were exclusively devoted to the decoration of her own little person. She was also a capital milliner and amateur dressmaker; but she had no taste for music, literature, housekeeping, or for any of the "daily rounds, the common tasks." She left all those sort of things to her sisters.

Honor, the youngest Miss Gordon, is twenty years of age, slight, graceful, and tall,—perhaps too tall. She might have spared some inches to her small relative, for she measures fairly five feet eight inches. She has an oval face, dark gray eyes, dark hair, and a radiant smile. In a family less distinguished by beauty she would have been noteworthy. As it is, some people maintain that, in spite of Fairy's marvellous colouring and faultless

features, they see more to admire in her younger sister,—for she has the beauty of expression. Honor is the useful member of the family. Jessie could not arrange flowers, cut out a dress, or make a cake to save her life. Honor can do all these. She has a sort of quick, magic touch. Everything she undertakes looks neat and dainty, from a hat to an apple-pie. Her inexhaustible spirits correspond with her gay, dancing eyes, and she is the life and prop of the whole establishment. She plays the violin in quite a remarkable manner. Not that she has great execution or can master difficult pieces, but to her audience she and her violin seem one, and there is a charm about her playing that listeners can neither explain nor resist.

The youngest Miss Gordon has her faults. Chief of these is an undesirable bluntness and imprudent recklessness of speech,—a deplorable fashion of introducing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, no matter how unwelcome or how naked,—and a queer, half-absent, and wholly disconcerting way of thinking aloud.

Her friends (who are many) declare that she is young, and will grow out of these tricks, and at any rate she is by far the most popular of the three sisters.

One gusty March morning the sea displayed towering gray waves, with cream-coloured crests, the rain beat noisily against the window in which Jessie Gordon stood, waiting for the kettle to boil and watching for the postman. Here he came at last, striding up the paved path in his shining oilskins, and with a thundering bang! bang! he is gone.

"The paper, a coal bill, and an Indian letter," said Jessie to Fairy, who, wrapped in a shawl, was cowering over the fire. "I'll take them up-stairs whilst you watch the kettle."

Mrs. Gordon always breakfasted in bed to "save

trouble," she declared, but to whom she omitted to mention. She turned the letters over languidly, and exclaimed,—

"One from India from Sara Brande. Wonders will never cease! What can she want? Well, let me have my tea at once, and when I have read her epistle I will send it down to you. And here, you can take the paper to Fairy."

Jessie returned to her tea-making. (She and Honor took the housekeeping week about.) In the middle of breakfast Susan stalked into the room—an unusual occurrence—and said,—

"Miss Jessie, the mistress is after pulling down the bell-rope. I thought the house was on fire. You are to go up-stairs to her this minute."

Jessie was absent about a quarter of an hour, and when she appeared, beaming and with a letter in her hand, she had such an air of suppressed exultation that it was evident to her sisters, even before she opened her lips, that the long-expected "something" had happened at last.

CHAPTER V.

AN INDIAN LETTER.

"GREAT, great news, girls!" cried Jessie, waving the letter over her head. "Mrs. Brande—I mean Aunt Sally—has written to ask one of us to go out and live with her, and she seems quite certain that her offer will be accepted, for she encloses a cheque for outfit and passage-money. It is a short invitation, too; whoever elects to see India must start within the next fortnight."

Honor and Fairy gazed at one another incredulously, and Fairy's delicate complexion changed rapidly from pink to crimson, from crimson to white.

"I'll read it to you," continued Jessie, sitting down as she spoke. "The writing is peculiar, and some of the words are only underlined four times. Ahem!

"BOOKWOOD, SHIRANI.

"DEAR SISTER-IN-LAW,—It is not often that I take up my pen, but I have something most important to say to you. I am not as young as I was, and I feel the want of some sort of company. Pelham is away a good deal, and I am left alone with Ben; he is the best-hearted creature in the world and knows every word I say, but he can't talk, nor help in the housekeeping, nor go to balls and church, being only a dog. What would you think of letting me have one of your girls? You have three, and might spare one. Indeed, three unmarried daughters must be a really terrible anxiety to any mother. We expect to be home in about a year, so if the worst comes to the worst, you will have her back again in twelve months' time. Whoever you send, you may be sure I will be a mother to her, and so will Pelham. She shall have the best of everything in the way of society and clothes, and I guarantee that she only knows the nicest *beaux*, and that she will be very happy. The hot weather is coming on, and travelling after April is dangerous, both by land and sea, so I would like you to send her as soon as possible. She ought to start not later than a fortnight after you receive this, otherwise it will be no use her coming at all. She could not set out again till October, and it would not be worth her while to come to us for six months. Pel encloses a cheque for her passage, and thirty-five pounds extra for boxes, gloves, petticoats, etc. I prefer to devise her dresses myself, and will turn her out smart. No doubt you are not in the way of seeing the new fashions, and we are uncommonly dressy out here. If she could be in Bombay by the *middle of April*, I could meet her at Allahabad and bring her up, for I don't approve of girls travelling alone. Pel is anxious, too, and hopes you won't refuse us. You know he has a good deal in his power; your girls are his *next-of-kin*, and a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse,—of course, not meaning that you are a blind horse. This place is gay in the season, and has plenty of *Tamashas*; as for snakes, there is no such thing; and with regard to climate, you can make yourself quite easy.

"The climatological conditions of these hill districts are a most important element in their physical geography, and will therefore require to be treated at considerable length. An extensive discus-

sion of the meteorology cannot be attempted, but sufficient data have already been collected to serve as a basis for general description of the climate. In this respect, the Himalayas, on account of their less distance from the equator, present many points of advantage as compared with the Alps and other European mountains."

[The above, with the exception of the underlining, had been boldly copied from a gazetteer found in Mr. Brande's writing-room.]

"There is generally a fair sprinkling of young men, and of course we entertain a great deal. She shall have a nice quiet pony and a new *rickshaw*, so we shall expect her without fail. Love to your daughters, and especially to our one.

"Yours truly,

"SARABELLA BRANDE.

"Now, what do you think of that?" inquired Jessie, looking alternately at her two staring sisters.

"I say that it is a hoax, of course! Some joke of yours, Jessie," returned Honor, with a playful snatch at the letter. "What is all that gibberish about uncle Pelham being a mother to one, and mother not being a blind horse, and the climatological condition of the hills, not to mention the snakes and the *beaux*? You ought to be ashamed; I could have done it better myself."

"Read it; examine the post-mark," said Jessie, now flinging it on the table.

Yes, there was no room for doubt; it was a *bona-fide* Indian epistle. As Honor turned it over critically, she suddenly exclaimed,—

"Have you seen *this*—the gem of the whole production,—the postscript?"

Both sisters bent forward eagerly, and there, just at the top of the last and otherwise blank sheet, was scribbled as a hasty after-thought,—

"P. S.—Be sure you send the *pretty* one."

"She must be a most original person," exclaimed Honor, with sparkling eyes. "And in the name of Dr. Johnson, what is a '*Tamasha*'?"

"Ask me something easier," rejoined Jessie.

"Then what does mother say to this remarkable invitation?"

"You might know better than to ask that!" broke in Fairy, who had been listening with evident impatience. "In this family it is, 'What does Jessie say?' What do you say, Jess?"

"I say, never refuse a good offer. It is only for twelve months, and of course one of us must go."

"Then, will you go?" inquired Fairy, with elevated brows.

"Am I the pretty one?" Jessie demanded, sarcastically. "I should be bundled back by the next steamer."

"No, of course; I never thought of that," rejoined her sister, meditatively. "I am the pretty one; there has never been any question of that, has there, girls?"

"No, never," returned Jessie, in her most matter-of-fact tone, and she and Honor exchanged stealthy glances.

For some seconds Fairy seemed buried in thought, as she drew patterns on the table-cloth with a fork. At last she looked up and exclaimed,—

"It is only for twelve months, as you say, Jess; twelve months soon fly round." And she threw back her shawl and leant her elbows on the table. "Never refuse a good offer, such as a pony, a rickshaw,—whatever that is,—the new dresses, the best society, the best beaux!" And she burst into a peal of shrill laughter as she exclaimed, "Do you know, girls, that I think I shall go."

A pause, the result of utter stupefaction, followed this unexpected announcement.

"Yes," she continued, with increased animation, "I believe I should like it, of all things. The idea grows on me. I am thrown away here. What is the use of a pretty face if it is never seen? Did she say thirty-five pounds for outfit? I can make that go a long way. I don't take yards of stuff, like you two giantesses. My tailor-made and my spring dress are new. I'll just

run up and talk it over with the mater." And she pushed back her chair and bustled out of the room.

Jessie and Honor remained, gazing at one another across the table in dead, suggestive silence, which was at last broken by Jessie, who said, in a tone of quiet despair,—

"I wish that ridiculous letter had never come! At first I thought it a capital thing. I thought you ought to accept."

"I!" cried Honor. "And, pray, why should you select me?"

"For half a dozen excellent reasons; you are pretty, young, bright, and popular. You have a knack of making friends. All the people about here and in the village would rather have *your* little finger than the rest of us put together. You walk straight into their hearts, my love, and therefore you are the most suitable member of this family to be despatched to India to ingratiate yourself with our rich relations."

"Your fine compliments are wasted, Jess, your 'butter' thrown away, for I am not going to India."

"No; and Fairy has ere this selected her steamer and travelling costume; if she has made up her mind to go, nothing will stop her; and Uncle Pelham and Aunt Sally have never been told that Fairy is—is—so small. What *will* they say?" regarding her sister with awe-struck eyes and a heightened colour.

What, indeed, would Mrs. Brande—who was already boasting of her niece from England, and loudly trumpeting the fame of the lovely girl she expected—say to Fairy? What would be her feelings when she was called upon to welcome a remarkably pretty little dwarf?

"It must be prevented," murmured Honor. "She cannot be allowed to go."

"Is Fairy ever prevented from doing what she wishes?" asked Jessie, with a solemn face.

To this pertinent question her sister could find no adequate reply. After a pause, she rose and said,—

"Let us go up-stairs and hear what she is saying to mother."

Mrs. Gordon was sitting up in bed with a flushed face and anxious expression, listening to the brilliant description of Fairy's future career in India.

Fairy, with both elbows on the bed and her pointed chin in her hands, was rapidly enumerating her new dresses, and wondering how soon they would be ready, declaring how fortunate it was that she had a quantity of patterns in the house, and that if her mother would only advance twenty pounds she could do wonders. She talked so incessantly and so volubly that no one had a chance of advising, objecting, or putting in one single word. Her mother and sisters listened in enforced, uneasy silence to the torrent of this little creature's almost impassioned eloquence.

"It will take a fortnight to get ready," she said. "This is the *fifteenth* of March; what a scurry there will be! You two girls will have to sew your fingers to the bone,—won't they, mother?"

Her mother faltered a feeble assent.

"I shall want at least twelve gowns and half a dozen hats. I must go into Hastings to-morrow——" She paused at last, with scarlet cheeks and quite breathless.

"There is nearly a week before the mail goes out," ventured Jessie, "and it is rather too soon to decide yet. The letter only came an hour ago, and there is much to be considered before mother can make up her mind as to which of us she can spare, and——"

"The whole thing is *quite* settled," interrupted Fairy in her sharpest key,—Jessie was not her favourite sister,—"only you are always so fond of interfering and managing every one, from mother down. Aunt Sara expressly asked for the pretty one; you saw it in black and

white, and mother says I am to please myself,—did you not, mother?" appealing to her parent, whose eyes sank guiltily before the reproachful gaze of her eldest daughter. Nevertheless, she bravely sighed out,—

"Yes, Fairy, I suppose so."

"There!" cried Fairy, triumphantly. "You see mother has decided, and I have decided! I am not like some people, who take weeks to make up their minds, especially when moments are precious. I must write a quantity of letters for the early post. Honor, do you remember the name of Mrs. Travers's dressmaker? and do you think I should get a habit and riding-boots?"

CHAPTER VI.

"ROWENA."

(Full life size.)

THE astonishing news that had come to "Merry Meetings" was soon shared by the entire village, thanks to Susan's sister, who filled the post of messenger and charwoman. The letter was warmly discussed in the sanded parlour of "The Cause is Altered" Inn, over the counter at Hogben's the grocer, at the Rectory, at Dr. Banks's, and also by the Trevers,—the family at the Hall,—a family to whom the Misses Gordon were indebted for most of their trivial gaieties. Opinion, whether in Hall or tap-room, was for once unanimous. Of course one of the Gordons must accept her rich uncle's offer, and that without any foolish or unnecessary delay. Although it was a wet afternoon, Cara and Sophy Trevor, Mrs. Banks, the rector, and Mrs. Kerry arrived almost simultaneously at "Merry Meetings," and half filled the draw-

ing-room, which was of moderate size, with a southern aspect and deep comfortable window seats. The furniture was old-fashioned and the carpet threadbare; but a few wicker chairs, a couple of Persian rugs, a quantity of pictures, books, flowers, and needlework, covered many deficiencies; it was the general sitting-room of the family, and if not always perfectly tidy, was at any rate delightfully home-like, vastly different to so many of its namesakes, which have a fire on stated days: gaunt, formal apartments, solely devoted to visitors. Mrs. Gordon's friends dropped in at all hours, but chiefly at five o'clock, and the tea and hot cakes dispensed at "Merry Meetings" were considered unequalled in those parts.

Behold a selection of Mrs. Gordon's nearest neighbours gathered eagerly round her hearth, whilst Honor made tea in thin old shallow cups.

"We all met at the gate!" explained Cara Trevor, "and have come, as you see, to call on you in a body, to hear your news with our very own ears. Is it true, dear lady, that one of the girls is going out to India immediately?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Gordon. "I heard from my sister-in-law this morning, she and my brother are most anxious to have one of their nieces on a visit, they give us very short notice,—only a fortnight. Honor, my love, Cara will take another cake."

"No, no, thank you," cried Miss Trevor, impatiently. "Pray do go on and tell me all about this delightful invitation, Honor. Where is your uncle? in what part of India?"

"He is at Shirani, a hill station, most of the year. I believe he has rather a good appointment, something to do with the revenue."

"I know all about Shirani," announced Sophy Trevor with an air of unusual importance. "We had a cousin quartered there once. It is a capital place for shooting, dancing, picnics, and tennis-parties,—so different to this

dead-and-alive Hoyle. It really ought to be spelt without the y. I wish some one would ask me to India. I would be ready to start to-night, with just a couple of basket-trunks and a dressing-bag. Which of you is going? I suppose you have not thought of it yet," but she looked straight at Honor.

"Oh, it is quite settled," rejoined Fairy in her clear shrill voice. "It was decided at once, as there is not a second to spare. You are to lose me." And she laughed affectedly. She had an extraordinarily loud laugh for such a little woman.

But there was no responding echo,—no, not even a smile; on the contrary, an expression of blank consternation settled down on every countenance.

Mrs. Banks was the first to recover the power of speech, as, with a somewhat hysterical giggle, she remarked to the company the self-evident fact,—

"I suppose the Indian mail came in to-day?"

"Yes," responded Jessie, adding, significantly, "and goes out on Thursday, so we have not sent an answer to Uncle Pelham as yet."

"He does not know what is in store for him," murmured Mrs. Kerry to Mrs. Banks, as she rose and put her tea-cup on a table beside her. Meanwhile Fairy had produced a number of bundles of patterns of dress-materials and requested the two Miss Trevors to give an opinion of their merits. This created a merciful diversion; most women enjoy turning over patterns (even patterns for mourning), and in desultory talk about dressmakers and chiffons the visit came to a close.

"Did you ever hear such an utterly crazy notion?" cried Mrs. Banks, as soon as she and the two Miss Trevors were outside the hall door. "I could scarcely believe my senses."

"And no wonder," said Sophy Trevor. "She should not be allowed to go, but she is so desperately obstinate



that if she has made up her mind to start all England will not stop her."

"My husband shall stop her," returned Mrs. Banks, emphatically. "He shall put it on her health, and say that she is too delicate; and that the climate will kill her."

"I doubt if even that would keep her at home," said Cara, who knew Fairy well. "How wretched Mrs. Gordon looked! Fairy is her idol and turns her round her little finger, and I like Fairy the least of the family: she is so selfish and so vain. Poor Honor is her slave, and, indeed, they all give in to her far too much; but if they allow her to go out to India, they will never see a penny of their rich uncle's money. He is expecting a nice, comely, ordinary girl, not a little monster."

"Oh, Cara!" protested her sister, in a deeply shocked voice.

"Well, you know she is a monster of selfishness and vanity," retorted Cara, with unabashed persistence.

The Reverend James Kerry, who was trudging behind with his wife, displayed an unusually elongated upper lip,—sure sign of excessive mental perturbation.

"Preposterous!" he exclaimed. "That child exercises a most baneful influence over her parent. I must see Mrs. Gordon alone and reason her out of this insane project."

"And so you will, no doubt, in five minutes," assented his partner, briskly, "and as soon as you have left Fairy will reason her back again. Surely, my dear, you know Mrs. Gordon? The whole matter rests in Fairy's hands, and our only hope is that she may change her mind or get the influenza, and there is but little chance of either."

It was now the turn of the Reverend James to expostulate angrily with his companion.

* * * * *

The next three days were a period of unexampled

misery to most of the inmates at "Merry Meetings." Fairy was feverishly gay and feverishly busy; though a severe cold kept her at home, she was never separated from her beloved patterns,—no, not even when in bed. Most of her time was spent in writing to shops, making calculations in pencil, trimming hats, and searching through fashion plates. She now had but two topics of conversation,—India and dress. Meanwhile her mother and sisters looked on, powerless, and in a manner paralysed by the sturdy will of this small autocrat. In these days there was considerable traffic to and fro from "Merry Meetings," and an unusual amount of knocks and rings at Mrs. Gordon's modest little green hall door. The postman, instead of bringing one paper and a meagre envelope as of yore, now staggered under a load of large brown parcels and an immense variety of card-board boxes. Telegrams were an every-day arrival, and letters poured in by the dozen. Fairy's preparations were advancing steadily, though her sisters whispered gravely to one another that "she must not be allowed to go." Who was to prevent her? Not her mother, who sat in her usual arm-chair, looking harassed and wee-begone, and now and then heaved heart-rending sighs and applied a damp pocket-handkerchief to her eyes.

Not the rector. He had reasoned with Fairy long and, as he believed, eloquently, but in vain. He pointed out her mother's grief, her great reluctance to part with her favourite child, her own uncertain health; but he spoke to deaf ears, and Dr. Banks, despite his wife's proud boast, fared but little better. He solemnly assured Fairy that she was not fit to go to India, to undertake the long journey alone, and whatever her aunt might say, the climate was only suited to people with robust constitutions. "Was she robust?" he demanded, with asperity.

"He knew best," she retorted in her pettest manner.

"One thing she did know, she was *going*. Her aunt had especially invited her, and why should she not have some amusement and see something of the world, instead of being buried alive at Hoyle. It was not living—it was mouldering."

"At any rate she would live longer at Hoyle than in India," the doctor angrily assured her. He was furious with this selfish, egotistical scrap of humanity, who had always secured the best of everything that fell to the lot of her impoverished family.

"As for amusement," he continued, "she would not find it very amusing to be laid up perhaps for weeks. She was a feverish subject,—had she thought of the sicknesses that periodically scourged the East, cholera and small-pox?" Fairy, who was constitutionally nervous, shuddered visibly. "Had she thought of long journeys on horseback, she, who shrieked if the donkey coughed his ears? She was, in his opinion, much too delicate and too helpless to think of leaving home."

Her determination was somewhat shaken by Dr. Banks's visit and by a feverish cold. Was it a foretaste of India already? But where filial duty and fear had failed to move her, vanity stepped in and secured a complete surrender.

The spoiled child of the family was sitting alone in the drawing-room late one afternoon, sewing pleasant anticipations and serious misgivings alternately into a smart silk blouse, when her thoughts were suddenly scattered by a loud and unfamiliar double knock. She heard a man's voice in the hall, and had barely time to throw off her shawl and give her hair a touch before the glass when Susan announced, "Mr. Oscar Crabbe." He was a rising artist who had been staying in the neighbourhood at Christmas, and had made no secret of his profound admiration for Miss Fairy Gordon, from a purely professional stand-point.

Oscar Crabbe was a good-looking man, with a pleasant voice, a luxuriant brown beard, and an off-hand, impetuous manner.

"Pray excuse my calling at this unceremonious hour," he said, as he advanced with a cold, outstretched hand. "I believe it is long after five o'clock, but as I was passing, I thought I would drop in on chance of finding some one at home. How are your mother and sisters?"

"My mother is lying down with a nervous headache, my sisters are shopping in Hastings, so you will have to put up with me," said Fairy, coquettishly.

"And you are the very person I most wish to see," returned Mr. Crabbe, drawing his chair closer as he spoke. "I want to ask you to do me a tremendous favour,—I want to paint your portrait for next year's Academy."

"My portrait?" she echoed, tremulously.

"Yes; I said something to you at Christmas, you may remember."

"I thought you were joking."

"No indeed. I was simply feeling my way, and if you will honour me with a few sittings, I shall be deeply grateful. I propose to paint you as Rowena, full life size,—you are an ideal Rowena."

"And when?"

"Oh, not for some months, not before autumn, but I always take time by the forelock, and as I was down here at the Trevors" (had Cara Trevors instigated this visit? History is silent, and the true facts will never be divulged), "I thought I would seize the opportunity of bespeaking a model for next season. I will only ask you to sit to me for the head and hands; the dress and figure I can work at in town. What do you say?"

"Oh, Mr. Crabbe," clasping her tiny hands rapturously, "I should have liked it beyond anything in the whole wide world! I am so sorry, but——"

"But your mother would not approve?"

"Not at all. She would be enchanted, but I am going to India immediately."

"To India?" he repeated, after an expressively long pause.

"Yes; my aunt and uncle have invited one of us,—it was most unexpected,—and I am going."

Mr. Crabbe looked grave, then he gave a sort of awkward laugh, and said, "Well, Miss Gordon, I enroll myself among the number of friends who deeply deplore your departure. I am extremely sorry; indeed, I have a double reason for regret, for I shall never find such a Rowena."

"And I am extremely sorry, too. There will be no one in India who will want to paint my picture."

"I am not so sure of that. A young fellow, a friend of mine, went out there last October, globe-trotting. He is the cleverest portrait-painter I know, though he calls himself an amateur and only paints for amusement, and in interludes of hunting and polo-playing. He has not to work for his daily bread like the rest of us, but if he had to do so, he would make his fortune if he studied and put his shoulder to the wheel. He has a genius for catching a true likeness, a natural attitude, a characteristic expression, and he does it all so easily, and so quickly. A few rapid dashes, and the canvas seems to *live*. It is a pity he does not take to our profession seriously and study, but his uncle abhors 'painting chaps,' as he calls them, and his uncle, whose heir he is, is a millionaire."

"How nice! And what is the name of this fortunate young man?"

"Mark Jervis."

"I must try and remember. Perhaps I may come across him and he may paint my picture, but it will be nothing in comparison to having it done by you and

hung in the Royal Academy." She turned her face upon her visitor with an expression of dreamy ecstasy. A delicate colour, a brilliant sparkle in her eyes, the becoming background of a red lamp-shade, which set off her perfect profile, all combined to heighten the effect of Fairy's transcendent beauty, and Oscar Crabbe frankly assured himself that he was then and there gazing upon the face of the most lovely girl in England. As he gazed he lost his head, and stammered out rapturously,—

"Oh, if I could only paint you as you are now! My reputation would be assured; you would make me famous."

"You mean, that you would make me famous," she returned, dropping her eyes bashfully. "Do you know that you almost tempt me to abandon India and remain at home."

"I wish you would; you are far too delicate clay for the fierce tropical sun, and India plays the devil—I mean," picking himself up, "it is the grave of beauty. If anything should happen to prevent your carrying out your trip, will you let me know without fail."

"You may be certain that I shall."

"I wonder that one of your sisters," he began, when the door opened and admitted the two ladies in question. They were cold, tired, longing for tea, and offered no serious resistance to Mr. Crabbe's immediate departure. He held Fairy's hand in his for several seconds, as if reluctant to release it, and he gave it a faint but distinctly perceptible pressure, as he said, "I will not say *bon voyage*, but *au revoir*. Remember your promise," and hurried away.

It was noticed by her relations that Fairy was unusually silent all that evening. She seemed buried in thought, and her pretty white forehead was actually knit into wrinkles as she stitched with deft and rapid fingers.



To tell the truth, the young lady was carefully weighing the pros and cons respecting her Eastern trip. She lay awake for hours that night revolving various questions in her busy little brain.

On one hand she would escape from Hoyle, and enjoy a gay and novel existence. She would be taken to balls and parties, and be the cynosure of all eyes. She would have plenty of pocket-money, plenty of pretty dresses, plenty of luxuries. That was one side of the shield. On the reverse, she mentally saw a hateful journey by sea, an unaccustomed life and climate, an ever-haunting dread of fever, cholera, snakes. She would probably have to accustom herself to riding wild ponies, to being borne along the brinks of frightful precipices. She would have no one to pet her, and hunt up her things, and do her hair, and mend her gloves,—yes, she would miss Honor dreadfully. Mr. Crabbe had assured her that India was the grave of beauty. Supposing she became a fright! Dr. Banks had hinted at shattered health. No, after all, she would remain at home; her aunt and uncle would be in England in a year's time; she would pay them a nice long visit without risking either health or looks. Then there would be "Rowena," a lasting and substantial triumph! She had visions of her picture hanging on the line in the Royal Academy, and guarded by police, in order to keep the surging mob of admirers at bay, of crowds gazing spell-bound at her portrait, of notices in the society papers, of photographs in shop windows, of wide celebrity, and the acknowledgment of her beauty in the face of all England.

The prospect was intoxicating. Towards dawn she fell asleep and enjoyed delightful dreams.

The next morning, ere descending to breakfast, she called her sisters into her room and said, in an unusually formal manner,—

"Jessie and Honor, I may as well tell you that I have

changed my mind and given up all idea of going to India, so I thought you ought to know at once."

"I am delighted to hear it," replied Jessie, with unaffected relief. "But why?" surveying her with questioning eyes. "Why have you so suddenly altered your plans?"

"I have been lying awake all night thinking of mother," was the mendacious reply. "I see she is fretting dreadfully; it would break her heart to part with me, and I shall never leave her, or at least," correcting herself, "never leave England."

"It is unfortunate that you did not think of mother a little sooner," said Jessie, glancing round the room, which was blocked up with boxes and parcels, containing purchases in the shape of hats, and shoes, and jackets, and many articles "on approval." "I think you are very wise to stay at home; but it is a pity that you have made such great preparations. Is it not, Honor?"

"No doubt you think so," retorted Fairy, sarcastically. "Of course it seems a pity that none of my pretty new things will fit either of you."

CHAPTER VII.

FAIRY RELENTS.

Now that, to every one's intense relief, Fairy had changed her mind and withdrawn her claim, the question remained, who was to go? Public opinion, her mother, Jessie, in short, every voice save one, said Honor. But Honor was indisposed to visit the East. She was not an enterprising young woman, and she was fond of home; and Fairy when alone with her shed showers of crocodile tears every time the subject was mentioned. She could

not bear to part with her favourite sister,—no, it was too cruel of people to suggest such a thing. Who, she asked herself, would dress her hair, and button her boots, and read her to sleep? And many of Honor's hateful tasks would fall to her, such as arranging the flowers, dusting the drawing-room, housekeeping, going messages,—for Jessie's time meant money, and must be respected. Abroad in the family circle she said in authoritative tones, "Let Jessie go! As to looks, *any* looks are good enough for India; even Jessie will seem handsome there. After all, why should any of them accept the invitation? England was a free country. She (Fairy) would send a nice grateful little letter and keep the cheque. Uncle Pelham would never be so mean as to take it back, and they would buy a pony instead of that maddening donkey, and make a tennis-ground, and take a fortnight's trip to London, and enjoy themselves for once in their lives." A week elapsed, the mail had gone out without an answer to Mrs. Brande. Jessie and her mother had both talked seriously to Honor, and she had listened with her pleasantest smile whilst they pointed out the advantages she would personally reap from her Eastern trip. She made no attempt to argue the point, only asked in a playful way, "Who was to drive the donkey? Who was to play the harmonium in church?" for she flattered herself that she was the only person in the parish who could do either; "and there was the garden and the poultry,—the hens would be lost without her!"

"We shall *all* be lost without you," rejoined Jessie, "but we can spare you for your own good."

"I don't want to be spared for my own good," she answered. "I prefer staying at home. You think that I shall carry all before me out there. You are greatly mistaken. All your geese are swans. I am a goose, and not a swan. I am just a country cousin, with a bad complexion and uncouth manners."

"Honor! You have a beautiful skin, only not much colour; and as for your manners, they are as good as other people's."

"You have often said that mine are alarmingly abrupt, and that I have the habits of a savage or a child in the way I blurt out home truths."

"Oh, but only at home, and you must not *always* mind what I say."

"Then what about the present moment? When you say that I ought to go out to Uncle Pelham, how am I to know that I ought to mind what you say now?"

"Upon my word, Honor, you are really too provoking!"

Little did Mrs. Gordon and her friends suspect how their weighty reasons and arguments were nullified by Fairy, who nightly, with arms wound tightly round her sister's neck and face pressed to hers, whispered, "You won't go; promise me, you won't go."

Jessie the clear-sighted at last began to suspect that Fairy was at the bottom of her sister's reluctance to acquiesce. Fairy was so demonstratively affectionate to Honor. This was unusual. It was too bad that Fairy should rule her family, and that her wishes should be law. Jessie conferred with her mother, and they agreed to try another plan. They would drop the subject and see if feminine contrariness would be their good friend. The word "India" was, therefore, not uttered for three whole precious days; patterns and passages, etc., were no longer discussed; matters fell back into their old monotonous groove, save that Mrs. Gordon frequently gazed at her youngest daughter and heaved unusually long and significant sighs.

One afternoon, ten days after the letter had been received,—which still lay unanswered in Mrs. Gordon's desk,—Honor met the rector as she was returning from practising Sunday's hymns on the wheezy old harmonium.

"This will be one of your last practices," he said. "I am sure I don't know *how* we are to replace you."

"Why should you replace me?" she asked. "I am not going away."

"Not going away?" he repeated. "I understood that it was all settled. Why have you changed your mind?"

"I never made up my mind to go."

"Why not? Think of all the advantages you will gain."

"Yes—advantages,—that is what Jessie is always drumming into my head. I shall see the world, I shall have pretty dresses, and a pony, and plenty of balls, and parties, and new friends."

"And surely you would enjoy all these: you are only nineteen, Honor."

"Yes; but these delights are for myself,—there is nothing for *them*," nodding towards "Merry Meetings." "I am the only person who will benefit by this visit, and I am sure I am more wanted at home than out in India. Jessie cannot do everything: her writing takes up her time, and I look after the house and garden; and then there is Fairy; she cannot bear me to leave her."

"You have spoiled Fairy among you," cried the rector, irritably. "Only the other day she was crazy to go to India *herself*. She must learn to give up like other people. It is very wrong to sacrifice yourself to the whims and fancies of your sister; in the long run they will become a yoke of dreadful bondage. Remember that you are not a puppet nor an idiot, but a free, rational agent."

"Yes," assented the girl. She knew she was now in for one of Mr. Kerry's personal lectures; it might be over in two or three minutes, and it might continue for half an hour.

"Now listen to me, Honor. I know you are a good, honest young woman, and think this plan will only

benefit yourself. You are wrong. Your mother is in poor health; her pension dies with her. If you offend your only near relative, how are you to exist?"

"I suppose we can work. Every woman ought to be able to earn her bread, even if it is without butter."

"Honor, I did not know that you held these emancipated views! I hope you won't let any other man hear you airing them. As for work, can Fairy work? Jessie, I know, can earn a few pounds, but she could barely keep herself; and if you fall sick, what will you do? It is best to survey matters from every stand-point. Your aunt and uncle have practically offered to adopt you. You will be home in a year's time, you will have made many friends for yourself and sisters, developed your own at present limited views of the world, and bring many new interests into your life. Your absence from home will be a considerable saving. Have you thought of that?"

"A saving!" she echoed, incredulously.

"Of course. Don't you eat? A healthy girl like you cannot live on air. And there's your dress."

"I make my own dresses."

"Nonsense!" with an impatient whirl of his stick; "you don't make the material. How can you be so stubborn, so wilfully blind to your own interests? If another girl had your chances, Honor Gordon would be the very first to urge her to go, and that in her most knock-me-down style. You have a much keener view, where other people's affairs are concerned, than your own."

"Of course, it is only for a year," said Honor. "I shall be back among you all within twelve months."

"Yes, if you are not married," said the rector, rashly.

"It appears to be the general impression in Hoyle that going to India means going to be married," said the girl, firing up and looking quite fierce. "Please put that idea quite at one side as far as I am concerned."

"Very well, my dear, I will," was the unexpectedly meek response.

Touched by his humility, she continued, "Then you really think I *ought* to go?"

"My good child, there can be no two opinions; every one thinks you *ought* to go."

"Except Fairy."

"Fairy has no right to stand in your way, and your absence will be an excellent lesson for her. She will learn to be independent and useful. Now, here is my turn, and I must leave you. Go straight home and tell them that you are ready to start, and that the sooner your mother sees about your escort and passage the better."

And he wrung her hand and left her. Honor walked home at a snail's pace, thinking hard. If Fairy would but give her consent, she would hold out no longer against every one's wishes. She would go; yes, without further hesitation. After all, it was only for one year. But although she did not know it, Fairy had already yielded. Jessie and Mrs. Banks had been talking to her seriously in Honor's absence, and she had been persuaded to listen to the voice of reason and interest.

If she had gone to India, as she intended, she would have been parted from Honor, and of her own accord.

This fact, brusquely placed before her by Mrs. Banks, she was unable to deny, and sat dumb and sullen.

"Uncle Pelham is sure to take to Honor," said Jessie, "and he will probably do something for us all, thinking that we are *all* as nice as Honor, which is not the case. She will be home in a year, and there will be her letter every week."

"Yes, and presents," put in Mrs. Banks, significantly. "She will have plenty of pocket-money, and will be able to send you home no end of nice things."

Fairy smiled and sighed, dabbed her eyes with her

handkerchief, and finally suffered herself to be coaxed and convinced, and when her sister opened the drawing-room door, with rather a solemn face, she ran to her, and put her arms round her, and said,—

"Honor, darling, I have promised to let you go!"

That very day the important epistle was despatched to Shirani, and Fairy—to show that she did nothing by halves—actually dropped it into the letter-box with her own hand. And during the evening she once more produced the bundles of patterns, and threw herself heart and soul into the selection of her sister's outfit.

CHAPTER VIII.

DANIEL POLLITT, ESQ., AND FAMILY.

THE grand dinner-party at 500 Prince's Gate was over, the last silken train had swept down the steps, the last brougham had bowled away, and a somewhat bored-looking young man indulged in a stretch and a prodigious yawn and strolled slowly back to the library, where the master of the house—a spruce little person of sixty, with a rosy cheek and active eye—stood before the empty fireplace (the month was June), with his coat-tails under his arms, engaged in chewing a toothpick. Wealthy he may be, judging from his surroundings, but he is certainly not distinguished in appearance; his scanty locks are brushed out into two sharp horns over his large ears; in spite of his blazing *solitaire* stud and faultless claw-hammer coat, he is plebeian,—yes, from the points of his patent-leather shoes to the crown of his bald head. It is difficult to believe that he is the uncle of the aristocratic young fellow who has just entered and cast himself into a deep arm-chair. What the French call "the look of race" is the principal thing

that strikes one about Mark Jervis. It is afterwards—possibly some time afterwards—that you realize the fact that he is remarkably handsome and considerably older than you took him to be at first glance. His smooth face and sunny hazel eyes are misleading: young Jervis is more than nineteen,—he is five-and-twenty.

"Well, Mark, that's over, thank God!" exclaimed Mr. Pollitt. "I hate these big dinners; but your aunt will have them. She says we owe them: women are never backward in paying those sort of debts! It was well done, hey? That new chef is a success. Did you taste the *paradeux aux Chartreuse*, or the *bouchés à la financière*, or that cold *entrée*?"

"No, Uncle Dan," strangling another great yawn.

"Ah, you sly dog! You were too much taken up with Lady Bodicea. She is considered a beauty,—at least, her picture made rather a stir. What do you think? How does she strike you?"

"To me she looks like a wax doll that has been held too close to the fire, and she is about as animated."

"Well, you can't say that of the American girl, Miss Tupper. There's a complexion! there's animation! here's a stunner for you!"

"A stunner indeed! She thrust her money down my throat in such enormous quantities that I could scarcely swallow anything else!"

"Then why the deuce did you not stuff some of mine down here, hey?" chuckling. "I saw you at Hurlingham this afternoon."

"Did you, sir? I had no idea you were there."

"It was a frightful squash,—hardly a chair to be had. The royalties, a fine day, and a popular match brought me. I suppose that was the new pony you were trying, brown, with white legs. How do you like him?"

"He is not handy, and he is a bit slow. He is not in

the same class with Pipeclay or the chestnut Arab; I don't think we will buy him, sir."

"Lord Greenleg was very anxious to hear what I thought of him. He only wants a hundred and thirty,—asked me to give him an answer there and then, as he had another customer, but I thought I had better wait till I heard your opinion. Is the pony worth one hundred and thirty guineas? What do you say?"

"I say cut off the first figure, and that is about his value," rejoined his nephew.

Mr. Pollitt looked blank. He rather liked buying ponies from lords, even at a high figure, but a hundred guineas was too much—was a stiff sum. He knew that he could rely on the young fellow's opinion, for, lazy as he seemed lounging there in an easy-chair, he could both buy a horse and ride a horse, which does not always follow. The languid-looking youth was a hard rider to hounds and a finished polo player.

"Then I suppose we won't mind the brown, eh, Mark?" said his uncle, rather dolefully. "After all, it is getting late in the season, and his lordship has another offer."

"Has he?" expressively. "Oh, then that is all right."

"Your side played up well to-day, my boy."

"And were well beaten,—two goals to four. Johnny Brind is no good as a back. He sits doubled up in his saddle like an angry cat and lets the ball roll out between his pony's fore legs,—and his language!"

"That did not come as far as my ears. I saw you speaking to Lord Robert Tedcastle. You were at Eton with him; you might bring him home to lunch some Sunday; and that Italian prince, did you come across him?" anxiously.

"No; I did not see him."

"I noticed you having a long talk with that young Torrens; what was he yarning about? He was nodding his head and waving his hands like a cheap toy."

"He was telling me of his plans. He and his brother are off to America next week; they are going on to Japan, Australia, and India. I say, Uncle Dan," suddenly sitting erect, "I wish you would let me travel for a couple of years and see the world."

A silence of nearly a minute, and then Mr. Pollitt burst out, "Now, this is some stuff that young ass Torrens has been putting into your head. To see the world! What world? You see it at home. England is the world. You have the best of everything here: the handsomest women, finest horses, best food and drink, best——" He paused, and his nephew, who was nursing his leg, blandly suggested "climate."

"Climate be hanged!—best society," bawled Mr. Pollitt. "The fact of the matter is, you young chaps don't know when you are well off. Travel—see the world,—skittles!"

"I know that I am exceedingly well off, thanks to you, Uncle Dan," rejoined his nephew, quietly. "I have capital polo ponies, a first-rate stud of hunters, a splendid allowance. But a fellow can't play polo, and hunt, and go to balls and theatres all his life; at least that's not my idea of life. I have nothing to do,—no profession, you know; you would not hear of my going into the service."

"No,—I hate the Army. What prospect does it offer the young idiots who are slaving to get into it? To live vagabonds and die beggars!"

"There was the Diplomatic Corps; but I've not brains enough for that."

"Boosh! You don't want a profession, taking bread out of other people's mouths. You are my heir,—*that's* your profession. As to intellect, there is a great deal too much intellect in these days; the world would be much easier to govern if there was less. You have brains enough, my boy; you did very well at Oxford——"

"I know that I am very fortunate," repeated the young man, "and that thousands of fellows would give anything to stand in my shoes——"

"Clarence for one," interrupted his uncle, with a loud chuckle.

"But I'm sick of the eternal treadmill round of the London season,—Ascot, Goodwood, Cowes, Scotland. Then back to London, and we begin the whole business over again. We see the same people and do the same things."

"How old are you, Mark?" broke in Mr. Pollitt, excitedly.

"Five-and-twenty."

"One would think you were eighty-five! But it's all the rage to be bored and *blasé*, and to give out that life is not worth living. You are in the height of the fashion, my boy. The fact of the matter is, that you are too prosperous. A blow of real trouble, cutting to the very bone, would do you no harm."

"Perhaps so. Properly speaking, I believe I ought to have been a poor man's son, and had to work my way; I feel that I could do it. I would not have minded being a soldier, a sailor, an explorer,—or even a stock-rider."

"In fact, to put the matter in a nutshell, anything but what you are."

"Well, Uncle Dan, you have fought your way up to the front step by step, and won your spurs, and enjoyed the battle. I should like to take some weapon and strike into the fray." Here he suddenly got up and came over to his uncle, and, putting his hand affectionately on his shoulder, said, "I would like to do something to make you," with a nervous laugh, "proud of me;" and as he looked into his uncle's shrewd little face his eyes shone with repressed excitement.

"I'm proud enough. You are my own flesh and blood; a good-looking chap, a capital rider, and a gentleman."



a bit too fond of dabbling with your nasty, dirty, oil-paints, a bit dreamy and quixotic; but——"

At this juncture the door was most gently pushed open, and a long hooked nose came slowly into the room, followed by a tall, thin, elderly lady attired in a clinging mist-coloured robe and blasing with diamonds: a sallow, discontented-looking person with a high-bred air, despite her tousled fringe.

"So you are both here!" she murmured sweetly.

"Yes," assented Mr. Pollitt; "and here is Mark," waving a short square hand towards him. "What do you think is his last craze, Selina? He wants to travel for a couple of years in order to see the world. Just like the hero of a fairy-tale."

Mark hastened to place a chair for his aunt, into which she gently sank, keeping her eyes steadily fixed on his as she did so, and gradually narrowing her gaze to a catlike glint.

"Do you know—that I rather like the idea," she remarked, after a momentary silence. "I think it is a shocking thing for a young man to waste his life lounging in clubs, gossiping, and gambling, or playing a game on the back of a pony. Travelling improves the mind and enlarges the ideas." Here catching sight of Mr. Pollitt's face of angry scorn she lost no time in adding, "You know it is all the fashion to travel; it's only the second-rate people and nobodies who stay at home. Lady Grace and Lord Kenneth are going out to India this cold weather, so is the Duke of Saltminster, the Marquis and Marchioness of Tordale, and crowds of other smart people."

Smart people were to Mr. Pollitt (as his crafty wife knew) the very salt of the earth, and his expression changed from that of repressed fury to grave attention.

"India! Perhaps I would not mind so much," he admitted after a pause. "The boy was born there, and he

could look up his father. Yes, and he might have some shooting, and pick up a few tigers and nice acquaintances—and companions."

"Oh, but of course Mark could not travel alone, dear. He must have a pleasant and experienced——"

"Bear-leader, or keeper; or what would you say to a chaperon?" broke in her husband.

"My dearest Daniel!" she gravely expostulated. "You know perfectly well that it would be frightfully dull for the poor boy, roaming about the country with no one to keep him company, not knowing where to go or what to say. Now, Clarence——" And she hesitated.

"Yes; now, Clarence; what now?" sharply.

"Clarence"—speaking very distinctly—"was stationed in India for eight years; he is an experienced Anglo-Indian, has hundreds of friends, talks Hindustani fluently, and could get no end of shooting and introductions to native *princes* (great emphasis on *princes*). He would be a capital guide for Mark."

"Umph!" with a short laugh. "I am not so sure of that, Mrs. Pollitt."

"Oh, my dear Dan, he is perfectly steady now; why, he is thirty-five, and has sown his wild oats. I never quite believe in these wonderfully good young men." And she shot a swift glance at Mark. "Except Mark, of course, and he ought to have been a parson, and"—with a little sneer—"he may yet become a missionary!"

"But India is no novelty to Clarence," protested Mr. Pollitt, "and by all accounts he made it too hot to hold him. Mark can easily tack himself on to some party of friends and do the tour with them. You say that the Rothmores——"

"Oh, yes," impatiently. "And they have made their arrangements months ago. Mark cannot tack himself on to people, as you express it; it would not do at all. On the contrary, he must have some one tacked on to

him! The trip will be a boon to my brother as well as to your nephew. Poor Clarence loves India. He is frightfully hard up; he would be an ideal companion for Mark," turning to him. "What do you say, Mark? Answer us quite frankly." And under these circumstances what could Mark say but

"Yes; oh, certainly. Clarence is a good sort."

"And at any rate, *he* can well be spared from home," added Mr. Pollitt, drily.

"Then you will consent to Mark's request, darling?" said his wife, rising and tapping him playfully with her big feather fan. "Think of all he will have to tell you, and of all the pretty things he will bring us."

"As long as he does not bring a *wife*!" growled the old gentleman. "Well, well, well, it is not often that you and Mark are on the same side in a debate, or that you second the resolution. When you combine you are too strong for me. I'll think it over."

Mrs. Pollitt gave her nephew by marriage a quick, significant glance, for this speech distinctly showed that the bill before the (head of the) house had passed, and that it now only remained to go into a committee of ways and means.

CHAPTER IX.

PERMISSION TO TRAVEL.

MARK JERVIS had been agreeably surprised by his aunt's enthusiastic co-operation. Thanks to her powerful alliance, he had carried his point, and was to spend twelve months travelling in India, accompanied by Mrs. Pollitt's brother, Captain Clarence Waring. The latter was about to revisit his former haunts in an entirely new

character, that of mentor and companion to a young man, and, moreover, a wealthy young man. All the world has heard of "Pollitt's Pearl Barley" and "Pollitt's Patent Fowls' Food." Are not its merits blazoned in flaming letters in railway stations, in fields bordering the rocking expresses that thunder through the land? Does not the name of "Pollitt" greet the miserable eyes of sea-sick travellers as they stagger down the companion-ladders of ocean greyhounds? In short, the enterprise of Daniel Pollitt and the fame of Pollitt's Pearl Barley is of universal renown.

Although he has never boasted of the fact, or assured his intimates that "he began life with the traditional sixpence," Mr. Pollitt is a self-made man. He talks freely enough of his wife's relations, of his nephew's famous pedigree, but he has not once alluded in the most distant fashion to his own little family-tree. Yet he has nothing to be ashamed of. His father was a gentleman by birth, a poor curate, who had left two almost penniless orphans,—Dan and a sister several years younger than himself. The former, while yet in his early teens, had clambered onto a stool in an office in the city, from thence (unusual sight) he had soared to success and wealth. Thanks to indomitable industry, shrewdness, and pluck, he was now a merchant of credit and renown. The latter, who was a remarkably pretty and well-educated girl, accompanied a lady to India in the capacity of governess, and in a startlingly short time married Captain Jervis of the Bengal Cavalry, a good-looking, popular officer, with a long pedigree and a somewhat slender purse. By all accounts, the marriage was a happy one. At the end of six years Mrs. Jervis died, and their only child, a boy of five, was sent to school in England. Five years later he was followed by his father, who rushed home on three months' leave in order to see little Mark, as well as his tailor and his den-

tist. Major Jervis, a bronzed, handsome, distinguished soldier, made an excellent impression on the plodding city man, his brother-in-law, who cordially invited him to stay with him at Norwood, where he had a luxurious bachelor establishment. And here, over unimpeachable claret and cigars, the Indian officer unfolded his plans.

Little Mark was about to have a step-mother; the lady was a Miss Cardozo, of Portuguese extraction, dark, handsome, not very young, but enormously wealthy, and quite infatuated about little Mark's papa. Her grandfather had been a military adventurer, whose sword and swagger had gained him the heart and treasures of a begum. Miss Cardozo's father was an indigo-planter in those good old times when indigo crops brought in lace of rupees, and she was his sole heiress, and an orphan. Besides the begum's wealth and jewels, she owned property in the Doon, property in the hills, property in Tirhoot, shares in banks and railways, and large investments in the funds.

Mr. Pollitt's shrewd little eyes glistened approvingly as he absorbed these particulars.

"Cut the service, bring her to England, and take a fine country place," was his prompt suggestion.

"No, no, she hates England: she was at school over here; she dreads our winters, and rain, and fog," replied Major Jervis. "And she likes my being in the service; I can tell you that our men and horses are something to see. Mercedes, that is her name, delights in pomp, and show, and glitter, and is much attached to India; and to tell you the honest truth, Pollitt, I'm partial to the country too. I have been out there twenty-two years, ever since I was eighteen, with only two short furloughs, and it's a country that suits me down to the ground. My near relations in England are every one dead, I have no ties here, all my friends and interests are out there, and I don't mind if I end my days in the East."

"And what about Mark?" demanded his listener.

"Yes, that is the question," said his father. "It's hard lines on the boy to have no home with me, but later on he shall go into the service and come out to us. You have been wonderfully kind to him, I know, having him here in his holidays, and he is very fond of you, as he ought to be. I feel rather guilty about him, poor chap; he is ten years old, and I have seen nothing of him for half that time, and now goodness knows how or where we may meet again. Of course no money shall be spared on his education, and all that, but——" He paused.

"But I'll tell you what you will do," continued Mr. Pollitt; "I'll put the whole matter in a nutshell. You are making a fresh start, you and the boy are almost strangers, so you won't feel the wrench. Give him to me. I am fond of him, I have no family, he is a handsome, plucky, little fellow, with poor Lucy's eyes. I will ensure him a first-class education, bring him up as my son, and make him my heir and leave him all I am worth. Come now?"

"It is a splendid offer, Pollitt, but I am fond of him too. I cannot provide for him as you would, I can only set him out in the world with a profession and make him a small allowance, for of course Mercedes's money will be settled on herself. If I resigned him to you, in years to come I might repent,—I might want him back."

"In years to come you will probably have half a dozen other sons, and be thankful to have one of them off your hands."

After considerable discussion, Jervis, the father, a little reluctant, Pollitt, the uncle, exceedingly eager and pressing, the matter was concluded. Mark was to correspond with his parent as regularly as he pleased, but he was to be, to all intents and purposes, his uncle Daniel's son.

Major Jervis made the most of his five weeks in England. He invested in a new and gorgeous uniform, a new battery of guns, saddlery, presents for Indian friends and his *fiancée*, and saw as much as possible of Mark. The more the pair were acquainted the better they liked each other. They went to the Tower, Madame Tussaud's, the Zoo, the theatres. Mark invariably accompanied his parent to tailors, boot-makers, and gunsmiths, and became subsequently quite the authority on these matters at school. His soldierly, open-handed sire, who loaded him with gifts, who told him tales of the stirring deeds of his ancestors, of his own swarthy sowars, of tiger hunting and elephant-drives, speedily became his hero and his idol.

On being sounded as to his own choice of a profession, Mark, after taking thought for a considerable time, gravely announced to his father and uncle "that he would prefer to be a bachelor."

"And by no means a bad choice," roared Mr. Pollitt in great glee. "Stick to that, my boy, stick to that; copy your old uncle."

"I don't think he will," remarked Major Jervis with decision; "he will take after me. We are a susceptible race, we Jervises, and I'll give him till he is two-and-twenty."

The day of parting was a dismal one for father and son. The child struggled desperately to be a man, to shed no tears, and bore himself wonderfully, at any rate in public; but after the cab had driven off, he rushed away and shut himself up in his own little bedroom, and flung himself upon the floor and abandoned himself to the bitterest grief he had ever experienced, and he was ten years old.

Some years after this scene Mr. Pollitt, to every one's surprise, married a faded, elegant-looking woman, of good family, but portionless. He bought a house in

Prince's Gate, rented a grouse moor, deer forest, and hunting-box, and invested in some celebrated diamonds. He had now amassed a great fortune, and at the age of fifty-five retired from business in order to spend it. But here arose an unexpected difficulty, he did not know how to enjoy the result of his labours save by proxy. He looked to his handsome, well-born nephew to manipulate his thousands, much as a child appeals to an experienced friend to work a new mechanical toy. All his own youth had been spent among great city warehouses, on wharves, and in offices. He had never ridden save on the top of an omnibus; he could not drive, shoot, row, or even fish, and, alas, it was now too late to learn. He, however, took to field sports in the character of a spectator with surprising enthusiasm. He walked with the guns on his moors and was much excited respecting the bag. He gave fancy prices for his nephew's hunters, and attended every meet (on wheels) where there was a prospect of seeing their performance, following the line, and keeping the hounds in sight as far as possible by means of short cuts and glasses.

He was a truly proud man when he saw his nephew's name in the *Field* as foremost rider in a sensational run. The worst of it was that Mark hated notoriety of any kind, hung back where he should come forward, came forward when he should have hung back. Had actually no desire to lease a theatre, keep race-horses, or even gamble; in short, he had not a single extravagant taste. (Here, indeed, was a most singular case. How many fathers are there in these latter days who feel hurt and disappointed because their sons will not spend thousands?) On the other hand, Mrs. Pollitt was only too ready to assist her partner in laying out large sums. She had many needy connections, and hoped to do great things for them, but she found to her deep chagrin that the personal spending of her husband's wealth was denied

ber. She had a liberal dress allowance, diamonds of the first water, equipages, a fine establishment, a French maid, but she might not thrust her hand into her lord and master's purse and scatter largesse to her poor relations, and what was a truly hard case, she might not even attempt to arrange an alliance between Mark and one of her nieces. No, Mr. Pollitt was resolved that his heir should marry *rank*. It must be "Mr. and Lady Somebody Jervis," and with Mark's good looks, money, and birth, there would be no difficulty in this little matter. Then Mark must go into parliament, settle down as a great landed proprietor, and ruffle it with the best. Thus was his future sketched out by his uncle, who wisely kept the sketch to himself.

Mrs. Pollitt was surprised to find her dear Daniel so obstinate and impracticable on several trifling matters. For instance, she had made up her mind to change the spelling of his name, and had even gone so far as to have her own cards printed "Mrs. D. Murray-Paulet, 500 Prince's Gate."

"How lucky that Daniel has a second name!" she said to herself, as she complacently examined her new title a few days after her marriage. She tripped across the room and held a card playfully before the bridegroom's spectacles, and the tiresome man had exclaimed,—

"Who is she? I can't stand visitors. Here, let me clear out first if she is coming up."

"The new card trick," as he subsequently called it, had been their first trial of strength, and the bride had succumbed with tears.

"Change his name," he had roared,—*"his name that he had made! Never! He was proud of it. It was the wife who changed her name on marriage, not the husband, was she aware of that?"*

Another subject on which she had had to yield was the housekeeping bills; they all passed through Mr. Pollitt's

hands, who settled them by cheque, consequently there were no pickings.

Mrs. Pollitt had her own particular schemes. She could not offer her kinsfolk much solid assistance, but did what she could. To her sister and nieces she distributed dresses and mantles scarcely worn; she gave them drives, boxes at the theatre, tickets, and perpetual invitations to dinner, lunch, and all her parties; to her brother Clarence such sums as she could spare from her pin-money. Clarence was ten years her junior,—gay, *débonnaire*, and good-looking. He had a pair of handsome, insolent blue eyes, a well-cultivated moustache, an admirable figure, and a rather overbearing manner. He was a complete man of the world, who had many pecuniary troubles, no fixed principles, and but few scruples. He was, nevertheless, pleasant, and by no means unpopular. Captain Waring had spent every penny that he possessed (also a good many pennies belonging to other people), and when his regiment came home from India he had been compelled to retire from the service, and had been living ever since on his friends and his wife. This Indian trip would be a capital thing for him, all expenses paid, and if he and Mark remained away a year, some of the other connections might get a footing at Prince's Gate. The aphorism, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," does not apply to uncles and nephews. If Mark were *never* to return it would not break his aunt's heart. If he had not been her husband's favourite she might have been fond of him. He was exceedingly presentable; she liked to have him in her carriage or opera-box (a gratification she seldom enjoyed). He was always polite, always thoughtful of her comfort, always respectful, though he had shown himself ready with a forcible reply on one or two critical occasions. But he did not understand the art of administering flattery, and she consumed it in large doses.

Now here Clarence was supreme; it was *he* who had solemnly assured her that she bore a striking resemblance to Sara Bernhardt,—yes, golden voice and all. And the poor deluded lady believed him, and attired herself in clinging draperies and combed her fringe well over her brows in order to emphasize her undeniable resemblance to the great actress. Once, when she questioned Mr. Pollitt on the subject, he had laughed so uproariously—so like a husband—that an apoplectic seizure seemed imminent.

Captain Waring was most enthusiastic respecting this Indian scheme, and naturally gave the project his warmest support. *Tête-à-tête*, he said, "It's a first-class notion of Mark's. The uncle keeps him far too tight in hand. No wonder he wants to break away and see the world and live his own life, poor devil."

"What nonsense!" protested Mrs. Pollitt, impatiently. "He has plenty of liberty and a latch-key——"

"And does not know how to use one or other! Besides, the uncle's proud eye is always on him. He follows him about like a dog,—worse, for dogs are not admitted into clubs! However, this twelve months' holiday in a far country will be a most blessed relief to the boy and A1 business for me. I'm on my last legs, and if this had not turned up I'd have had to make strong running with Miss Clodde. She is common and repulsive-looking, but has thirty thousand pounds. I hope I may never be so *desperate* as to marry her; at any rate I have a year's respite."

"How do you know she would have you, Clar?"

Clar's laugh was an interesting study in manly complacency.

"I really wish you were married," continued his sister rather peevishly.

"Yes, to a rich elderly widow who has had her fling; that is my style."

"What a horrible way of talking! You are really too dreadful. I suppose this trip will be rather costly?"

"Rather!" emphatically.

"And you will be the treasurer?" opening her pale eyes to their widest extent.

"I'm not so sure of that," shaking his head. "Of course, as I am the manager, and am personally conducting this tour, all payments ought to come from me. 'The uncle,' however, is rather shy of having monetary dealings with his brother-in-law, as you know by sad experience. However, I may be able to work it once we are in India, and you may depend upon me for making the most of my time and—opportunities. I was so hard up I was thinking of taking a leaf out of Charlie Wilde's book. He writes hymns and tracts——"

"How absurd you are! What preposterous nonsense! Charlie Wilde, who has never entered a place of worship for years, write tracts!"

"I tell you that he does," persisted Clarence. "He has a wonderful knack, and does the pathetic and emotional style A1; gets about ten pounds apiece, and invests the money in a flutter on the turf."

"Well, Clar," said his deeply-shocked sister, "I cannot compliment you on your companions, and whatever you may come to, I hope you will never arrive at such a pitch of wickedness as that."

On one point Captain Waring and Mr. Pollitt were most warmly agreed,—viz., that "the trip must be done in good style, if done at all."

Mark was inclined to travel "on the cheap," his uncle had complained, and had protested against a large quantity of baggage, a battery of guns, and a valet.

"Thirty pairs of boots!" he cried. "What rubbish! I am not going to walk round India."

"But Clarence says you can't do with less, and he must know better than you do," argued Mr. Pollitt. "I

wish you to travel like a gentleman, not like a bagman! There is where you disappoint me, my boy; you make no show, no dash; your tastes are all for quiet; your favourite character is the violet, and you prefer a back seat. You are going out in the same steamer with a lot of nobles. I've seen to that, and it is as likely as not that you will join forces when you land. These swells take to you. As for me, they only take to my dinners and my deer forest. However, as long as you are in the best set I don't care; I'm satisfied."

"I think Clarence and I will stick to ourselves and not join any party, sir. We will be more independent. He has sketched out our beat,—Bombay, Poonah, Secunderabad, Travancore, Madras, Ceylon, Calcutta, the hills. And that puts me in mind to ask if you have any idea of my father's whereabouts?"

"Bostock & Bell, Bombay, are his agents," evading the question and his nephew's eyes.

"I know that. I have written to their care steadily for the last six years."

"And never had an answer!" with ill-concealed satisfaction.

"No, except a Pioneer, at long, long intervals."

"Just to show that he is alive! Let me see; it is eight years since he left the service and went to live at a place called the Doon. He wrote pretty regularly up to then, and when Mrs. Jervis was killed in that carriage accident he never sent a line, only a paper. Poor woman! I believe she led him a devil of a life. She was insanely jealous."

"I suppose I can get his address in Bombay; his real address, I mean."

"Yes, I should think so."

"And then I shall look him up at once."

"If he will be looked up. The Jervises are an eccentric family. I heard some queer stories of them not long ago."

"But my father never struck you as eccentric, did he?"

"No; and of course you must try and see him. But don't let him lay hands on you and keep you, my boy. He was a handsome, persuasive sort of fellow, and had wonderful personal charm, when he chose to exert it. India has cast a spell upon him, and kept him with her for the best part of his life. Don't let India do the same by you."

"No fear of that," with emphasis.

"I'm sorry now you are going out there, for several reasons. I would have preferred China or Australia, but Waring had his say and his way."

"And I had my say and my way, too, Uncle Dan. India is my native land; I remember it distinctly. The servants, with their dark faces and big white turbans, my little chestnut pony, which was called 'Lal Tatoo,' and I want to see my father. You know we have not met for fifteen years."

"I know," assented Mr. Pollitt, gloomily; and added, after a pause, "I wonder, now, if it would be possible for you to throw me over and stop out there with him."

"There is not the smallest probability of that; besides, my father does not want me."

"And supposing that he *did*!" exclaimed Mr. Pollitt, suddenly jumping up and beginning to walk about the room. "Bear this in view, that you must make up your mind between us. You cannot be son and heir to two men. You can pay him a visit of a week, or at most a month; but if you postpone coming home at his request, I warn you that you may stay in India till I fetch you. To put the matter in a nutshell, I wash my hands of you forever! Not one farthing of my money will you see," he continued, speaking in great excitement. "I shall leave every shilling to hospitals; you understand that, eh?" he gasped, breathless.

"Yea, and it would be but just; I cannot live with my father in India and be your adopted son at home; but you are needlessly alarmed. I shall turn up again within a year without fail. I'll take a return ticket if you like."

"Well, that's a bargain, my boy. I'm a bit jealous of your father, and it's a nasty, low, ungentlemanly feeling. I must confess that I have been glad that he, so to speak, dropped you. But he handed you over to me when he married the begum, and you are my son, not his."

The day of departure arrived. The valet (a somewhat garrulous person with superb references), in charge of three cabs loaded with baggage, preceded the travellers to Victoria, whilst Mr. and Mrs. Pollitt drove the young man in the family landau, in order to see the last of them.

As Mark and his uncle slowly paced the platform, the latter, who had been incessantly fussy all the morning, said,—

"Now I hope nothing has been forgotten, and that you have everything you want?"

"I'm sure we have, and ten times over."

"You will write often,—once a week,—if only a line, eh? Mind you don't forget us."

"No fear of that, Uncle Dan."

"And remember our bargain, though I have not taken return tickets, after all. Don't stay longer than the year. I don't know how I'm to get on without you. I can never use the mail phaeton now, for I hate sitting beside the coachman; and, you know, I tried to drive once, and the result. There will be no one to take me on the river on a hot afternoon; other people but you think an old foggy has no business there. Oh, I shall miss you! I've lodged money for you in Bombay with Bostock & Bell" (naming a magnificent sum), "and when

it's done you must come home, for I won't send you another stiver. It's in your name, of course; you will be paymaster."

"All right, uncle."

"Keep your cheque-book locked up. Don't let a tiger get hold of you, or one of those scheming husband-bunting women that Clarence talks about."

"You may make your mind quite easy on that score," with a rather derisive laugh.

"Well, time is up, my dear boy. I am sorry you are going; take care of yourself. God bless you," wringing his hand as he spoke. Meanwhile Mrs. Pollitt and her brother had also been having a few parting words.

"Now, Clar," she said, imperiously, "I have done a good thing for you. This is a splendid chance. Be sure you make the most of it. If you please 'the uncle,' as you call him, he will help you to something better by-and-by."

Clarence nodded sagaciously. He was in the highest spirits.

"You are not limited to time, you know," she continued, in a whisper.

"I know." And there was a significant look in his right eye, almost approaching to a wink.

"And you will be manager and paymaster."

"Guide, counsellor, and friend. You bet."

"And now, dear boy, *do* be prudent; don't get into any more entanglements with grass widows; don't get into any more betting or gambling scrapes. Promise me."

"I shall be as steady as old Time, or young Mark himself, and I can't say more. Well, good-bye, and thanks awfully, Lina. I must say you *do* stick to your own people;" adding, with a hasty kiss, "I see we are off."

As the carriage moved slowly past the Pollitts, who

were standing side by side, Clarence flung himself back, with a boisterous laugh, as he exclaimed,—

"I declare, the uncle seems quite out up. Ha, ha, ha! Upon my soul, I believe the old chap is *crying*!"

CHAPTER X.

MAJOR BYNG'S SUGGESTION.

MAJOR BYNG, a wiry, dried-up little officer, with remarkably thin legs and sporting proclivities, was reclining in a long chair in the verandah of the "Napier Hotel," Poonah, smoking his after-breakfast "Trichy" and running his eye over the "Asian" pocket-book.

"Hullo, Byng, old man!" cried a loud, cheerful voice; and, looking up, his amaze was depicted in the countenance he turned upon Clarence Waring.

"Waring! Why, I thought——" putting down his book and sitting erect.

"Thought I had gone home, sold out, and was stone broke. But here I am, you see, on my legs again."

"Delighted to hear it," with a swift glance at Waring's well-to-do air and expensive-looking clothes.

"Sit down, my dear boy," he cried, cordially, "sit down, and have a cheroot, and tell me all about yourself and what has brought you back again to the land of regrets. Is it tea, coffee, or gold?"

"Gold in one sense. I am companion to a young millionaire, or rather to the nephew of a man who has so much money and no children that he does not know what to do."

"And who is the young man? Does he know what to do?"

"His name is Jervis,—his rich uncle is married to my

sister; we are connections you see,—and when he expressed a desire to explore the gorgeous East, my sister naturally suggested me for the post of guide, philosopher, and friend."

Here Major Byng gave a short, sharp laugh like a bark.

"We landed in Bombay ten days ago, and are going to tour about and see the world."

"What is the programme?"

"My programme is as follows: Poonah races, Secunderabad races, Madras races, a big game shoot in Travancore, expense no object, elephants, beaters, club cook, coolies with letters and ice for the champagne. Then I shall run him about in the train a bit, and show him Delhi, Agra, Jeypore; after that we will put in the end of the cold weather in Calcutta. I have lots of pals there, and from Calcutta we will go to the hills to 'Shirani. I shall be glad to see the old club again,—many a fleeting hour have I spent there!"

"That same club had a shocking bad name for gambling and bear-fighting," said Major Byng.

"I believe it had, now you mention it; but you may be sure that it has reformed—like myself."

"And this young fellow, what is he like?"

"Quiet, gentlemanly, easy-going, easily pleased; thinks every one a good sort," and Waring laughed derisively; "abhors all fuss or show; never bets, never gets up in the morning with a head; no expensive tastes."

"In fact, his tastes are miserably beneath his opportunities. What a pity it is that the millionaire is not your uncle!"

"Yea, instead of merely brother-in-law, and brothers-in-law are notoriously unfeeling. However, I have adopted mine as my own blood relation for the present. I boss the show; come and dine with me to-night and tell me all the 'gup' and give me the straight tip for the Arab purse."

"All right. Is this young Jervis a sportsman?"

"He is a first-class man on a horse and he plays polo, but he does not go in for racing, more's the pity."

"Plays polo, does he? By Jove!" And an eager light shone in the major's little greenish eyes. "I've a couple of ponies for sale."

"He does not want them now, whatever he may do later in Calcutta or in the hills. I shall be looking out for three or four for myself,—good sound ones, mind you, Byng; up to weight. I've put on flesh you see, but I dare say my anxious responsibilities will wear me down a bit. Jervis does not weigh more than ten stone, and talk of the devil, here he comes."

Major Byng turned his head quickly, as at this moment Waring's travelling companion, a slight, active-looking young man, entered the compound closely pursued by a swarm of hawkers and their accompanying train of coolies, bearing on their hands the inevitable Poonah figures, hand screens, pottery, beetle-work, silks, silver, and jewellery.

"I say, Waring," he called out as he approached, "just look at me! One would think I was a queen bee. If this goes on, you will have to consign me to a lunatic asylum, if there is such a place out here."

"Mark, let me introduce you to my old friend Major Byng."

Major Byng bent forward in his chair,—to stand up was too great an exertion, even to greet a possible purchaser of polo ponies,—smiled affably, and said,—

"You are only just out, I understand. How do you like India?"

"So far, I loathe it," sitting down as he spoke, removing his topee and wiping his forehead. "Ever since I landed I have lived in a state of torment."

"Ah, the mosquitoes!" exclaimed Major Byng, sympa-

thetically; "you will get used to them. They always make for new arrivals and fresh blood."

"No, no; but human mosquitoes. Touts, hawkers, beggars, jewellers, horse-dealers. They all set upon me from the moment I arrived. Ever since then my life is a burthen to me. It was pretty bad on board ship. Some of our fellow-travellers seemed to think I was a great celebrity, instead of the common or ordinary passenger; they loaded me with civil speeches, and the day we got into Bombay I was nearly buried alive in invitations,—people were so sorry to part with me!"

"Here is a nice young cynic for you!" exclaimed Captain Waring, complacently. "He is not yet accustomed to the fierce light that beats upon a good-looking young bachelor, heir to thirty thousand a year."

"Why not make it a hundred thousand at once while you are about it?" exclaimed the other, impatiently. "How could they tell I was heir to any one? I'm sure I am a most every-day looking individual. My uncle's income is not ticketed upon my back!"

"It was in one sense," interrupted Waring, with a chuckle.

"It was only with the common, vulgar class that I was so immensely popular."

"My dear fellow, you are much too humble-minded. You were popular with every one."

"No, by no means; I could have hugged the supercilious old dame who asked me with a drawl if I was in any way related to Pollitt's Patent Fowls' Food. I was delighted to answer, with effusion, 'Nephew, ma'am.' She despised me from the very bottom of her soul, and made no foolish effort to conceal her feelings."

"Ah! She had no daughters," rejoined Waring, with a scornful laugh. "The valet told all about you. He had nothing on earth to do but magnify his master and consequently exalt himself. Your value is reflected in

your gentleman's gentleman, and he had no mock modesty, and priced you at a cool million. By the way, I saw him driving off just now in the best hotel landau, with his feet on the opposite cushions and a cigarette in his mouth. He is a magnificent advertisement."

They were now the centre of a vast mob of hawkers, who formed a squatting circle, and the verandah was fully stocked. The jewellers had already untied their nice little tin boxes from their white calico wrappers, and their contents were displayed on the usual enticing squares of red saloo.

"Waring Sahib!" screamed an ancient vender with but one eye. "Last time, three or four years ago, I see you at Charleville Hotel, Mussouri, I sell your honour one very nice diamond bangle for one pretty lady."

"Well, Crackett, I'm not such a fool now. I want a neat pearl pin for myself." He proceeded to deliberately select one from a case, and then added, with a laugh, "That time, I paying for lady; *this* time, gentleman," pointing to Jervis, "paying for me."

"I can't stand it!" cried Jervis, jumping to his feet. "Here is the man with the chestnut Arab and the spotted cob with pink legs that has been persecuting me for two days; and here comes the boy with the stuffed peacock, who has stalked me all morning; and I see the girl in the thunder-and-lightning waistcoat. I know she is going to ask me to ride with her." And he snatched up his topes and fled.

Major Byng noticed Jervis at the *table-d'hôte* that evening. He had been cleverly "cut off" from Waring, and was the prey of two over-dressed, noisy young women. Mrs. Pollitt was mistaken, second-rate people *did* come to India.

"I'll tell you what, Waring," he said to that gentleman, who was in his most jovial, genial humour, "that

young fellow is most shamefully mobbed. His valet has given him away. If you don't look out, he will slip his heel-ropes and bolt home. Pray, observe his expression! Just look at those two women, especially at the one who is measuring the size of her waist with her serviette for his information. He will go back by the next steamer, —it is written on his forehead."

"No, he won't do that," rejoined Clarence, with lazy confidence. "He has a most particular reason for staying out here for a while; but I grant you that he is not enjoying himself and does not appear to appreciate seeing the world,—and it is not a bad old world if you know the right way to take it. Now if I were in his shoes," glancing expressively across the table, "I'd fool that young woman to the very top of her bent."

In the billiard-room, when Mark joined them, Major Byng said, "I saw your dismal plight at dinner and pitied you. If you want to lead a quiet life, and will take an old soldier's advice, I would say, get rid of the valet; send him home with half your luggage; then start from a fresh place where no one knows you, with a good Mussulman bearer, who is a complete stranger to your affairs. Let Clarence here be paymaster. He can talk the language, and looks wealthy and important. *He* won't mind bearing the brunt, or being taken for a rich man, if the trouble breaks out again; and you can live in peace, and gang your ain gait."

The major's advice was subsequently acted upon with most excellent results. The cousins meanwhile attended the Poonah races, where Clarence met some old acquaintances.

One of them privately remarked to Major Byng, "Waring seems to have nine lives like a cat, and looks most festive and prosperous. I saw him doing a capital ready-money business with the 'Bookies' just now, and he is a good customer to the Para Mutual. It is a little

startling to see him in the character of mentor I only hope he won't get into many scrapes."

"Oh, Telemachus has his head screwed on pretty tight, and he will look after Waring,—the pupil will take care of the teacher. He is a real good sort, that boy. I wonder if his people know how old Clarence used to race, and carry on and gamble at the lotteries, and generally play the devil, when he was out here?"

"Not they!" emphatically.

"He owes me one hundred rupees this three years; but he is such a tremendous Bahadur now that I am ashamed to remind him of such a trifling sum. I sincerely hope that he has turned over a new leaf and is a reformed character. What do you say, Crompton?"

"I say amen, with all my heart," was the prompt response.

Mark Jervis had gone straight to the agents, Bostock & Bell, the day he had landed in Bombay, and had asked for his father's address. He only obtained it with difficulty and after considerable delay. The head of the firm, in a private interview, earnestly entreated him to keep the secret, otherwise they would get into trouble, as Major Jervis was a *peculiar man*, and most mysterious about his affairs,—which were now entirely managed by a Mr. Cardoso. Major Jervis had not corresponded with them personally for years. He then scribbled something on a card, which he handed to the new arrival, who eagerly read,—

"Mr. Jones,
"Hawal-Ghat, via Shiraz, N. W. P."

The major's son despatched a letter with this superscription by the very next post.

CHAPTER XI.

A RESERVED LADY.

A HOT moonless night towards the end of March and the up-mail from Bombay to Calcutta has come to a stand-still; the glare from the furnace and the carriage-lamps lights up the ghostly-looking telegraph-posts, the dusty cactus hedge, and illuminates a small portion of the surrounding jungle. Anxiously gazing eyes see no sign of a station, or even of a signalman's hut, within the immediate glare; and beyond it there looms a rocky, barren tract, chiefly swallowed up in inscrutable darkness.

There is a Babel of men's voices, shrill and emotional, and not emanating from European throats; a running of many feet, and above all is heard the snorting of the engine and the dismal shrieks of the steam-whistle.

"What does it all mean?" enquired a silvery treble, and a fluffy head leant out of a first-class ladies' compartment.

"Nothing to be alarmed about," responded a pleasant tenor voice from the permanent way. "There has been a collision between two goods trains about a mile ahead, and the line is blocked."

"Any one killed?" she drawled.

"Only a couple of niggers," rejoined the pleasant voice in a cheerful key.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the lady, with sudden animation. "Why, Captain Waring, surely it cannot be you!"

"Pray, why not?" now climbing up on the foot-board. "And do I behold Mrs. Bellett?" as the head and shoulders of a good-looking man appeared at the win-

dow and looked into the carriage, which contained a mountain of luggage, two ladies, a monkey, and a small green parrot.

"Where have you dropped from?" she enquired. "I thought you had left India for ever and ever. What has brought you back?"

"The remembrance of happier days," he answered with a sentimental air, "and a P. & O. steamer."

"But you have left the service, surely?"

"Yes, three years ago; it was too much of a grind at home. Formerly I was in India on duty, now I am out here for pleasure. No bother about overstaying my leave,—no fear of brass hats."

"Meanwhile is there any fear of our being run into by another train?" enquired the second lady nervously,—a lady who sat at the opposite side of the compartment, with her head muffled up in a pink shawl.

"Not the smallest; we are perfectly safe."

"Captain Waring, this is my sister, Mrs. Coote," explained Mrs. Bellett; "and now perhaps you can tell us where we are, and what is to become of us?"

"As to where you are, you are about three miles from Okara Junction; as to what will happen to you, I am afraid that you will have to walk there under my escort,—if I may be permitted that honour."

"Walk three miles!" she repeated, shrilly. "Why, I have not done such a thing for years, and I have on thin shoes. Could we not go on the engine?"

"Yes, if the engine could fly over nearly a hundred luggage-waggons. It is a fine starlight night; we will get a lamp, and can keep along the line. They have sent for a break-down gang, and we shall catch another train at Okara. We will only have about an hour or two to wait."

"Well, I suppose we must make the best of it," said Mrs. Coote, "like others," as numbers of natives flocked

past, chattering volubly, and carrying their bedding and bundles.

"I wish we could get supper at Okara," said her sister. "I am sure we shall want it after our tramp; but I know we need not build on anything better than a goat chop and the day before yesterday's curry. However, I have a tea-basket."

"I can go one better," said Captain Waring. "I have a tiffin-basket well supplied with ice, champagne, cold tongue, potted grouse, cake, fruit——"

"You are making me quite ravenous," cried Mrs. Bellett. "But how are you to get all these delicacies to Okara?"

"By a coolie, I hope. If the worst comes to the worst, I will carry them on my head sooner than leave them behind. However, rupees work wonders, and I expect I shall get hold of as many as will carry the basket and also your baggage,—I suppose fifty will do?" And with a grin he climbed down out of sight.

"What a stroke of luck, Nettle!" exclaimed Mrs. Bellett. "He used to be such a friend of mine at Missouri, and imagine coming across him in this way! He seems to be rolling in money. He must have come in for a fortune, for he used to be frightfully hard up. I'm so glad to meet him."

"Yes, it's all very fine for you, who are dressed," rejoined the other in a peevish voice; "but just look at me, in an old tea-jacket, with my hair in curling-pins."

"Oh, you were all right; I'm certain he never noticed you!" was the sisterly reply. "Let us be quick and put up our things. I wish to goodness the Ayah was here." And she began to bustle about, and strap up wraps and pillows, and collect books and fans.

Every one in the train seemed to be in a state of activity preparing for departure, and presently many parties on foot, with lanterns, might be seen streaming

along the line. Captain Waring promptly returned with a dozen coolies, and soon Mrs. Bellett's carriage was empty. She and her sister were assisted by Captain Waring and a young man,—presumably his companion. Ere descending, Mrs. Bellett, who had a pretty foot, paused on the step to exhibit the thinness of her shoes, and demanded, as she put out her Louis Quatorze sole, "how she was to walk three miles in *that*, along a rough road?"

The two ladies were, nevertheless, in the highest spirits, and appeared to enjoy the novelty of the adventure. Ere the quartette had gone twenty yards the guard came shouting after them,—

"Beg pardon, sir," to Captain Waring, "but there is a lady quite alone in my charge. I can't take her on; I must stay and see to the baggage, and remain here; and would you look after her?"

"Where is she?" demanded Waring, impatiently.

"Last carriage but one,—reserved ladies, first-class."

"I say, Mark," turning to his friend, "if she is a reserved lady you are all right. He is awfully shy, this young fellow," he explained to his other companions, with a loud laugh. "I don't mind betting that she is old,—and, you know, you are fond of old women,—so just run back, like a good fellow. You see I have Mrs. Bellett and her sister; you won't be five minutes behind us, bring on the reserved lady as fast as you can."

The other made no audible reply, but obediently turned about and went slowly past the rows of empty carriages until he came nearly to the end of the train. Here he discovered a solitary white figure standing above him in the open door of a compartment, and a girlish voice called down into the dark,—

"Is that you, guard?"

"No," was the answer; "but the guard has sent me to ask if I can help you in any way?"

A momentary pause, and then there came a rather doubtful "Thank you."

"Your lamp has gone out, I see; but I can easily strike a match and get your things together. There is a block on the line, and you will have to get down and walk on to the next station."

"Really! Has there been an accident? I could not make out what the people were saying."

"It is not of much consequence,—two goods trains disputing the right of way; but we shall have to walk to Okara to catch the Cawnpore mail."

"Is it far?"

"About three miles, I believe."

"Oh, that is not much. I have not many things,—only a dressing-bag, a rug, and a parasol."

"All right; if you will pass them down I will carry them."

"But surely there is a porter," expostulated the lady, "and I need not trouble you."

"I don't suppose there is what you call a porter nearer than Brindisi, and all the coolies are taking out the luggage. Allow me to help you."

In another second the young lady, who was both light and active, stood beside him on the line. She was English, she was tall, and she wore a hideously-shaped country-made topee; that was all that he could make out in the dim light.

"Now, shall we start?" he asked, briskly, taking her bag, rug, and parasol.

"Please let me have the bag," she entreated. "I—I—that is to say, I would rather keep it myself. All my money is in it."

"And I may be a highwayman for what you know," he returned, with a laugh. "I give you my word of honour that if you will allow me to carry it I will not rob you."

"I did not mean that," she stammered.

"Then what did you mean? At any rate, *I* mean to keep it. The other passengers are on ahead; I suppose you are quite alone?"

"Almost; there is a servant in the train who is supposed to look after me, but I am looking after him and seeing that he is not left behind at the different junctions. We cannot understand one word we exchange, so he grins and gesticulates, and I nod and point; but it all comes to nothing, or worse than nothing. I wanted some tea this morning, and he brought me whiskey and soda."

"And have you no one to rely on but this intelligent attendant?"

"No. The people I came out with changed at Khandala and left me in charge of the guard, and in a through carriage to Allahabad; of course, we never expected this."

"So you have just come out from home?" he observed, as they walked along at a good pace.

"Yes; arrived yesterday morning in the 'Arcadia.'"

"Then this is the first time you have actually set foot on Indian soil, for trains and gharries do not count."

"It is. Are there," looking nervously at the wild expanse on either hand, "any tigers about, do you think?"

"No, I sincerely hope not, as I have no weapon but your parasol. Joking apart, you are perfectly safe. This," with a wave of the aforesaid parasol, "is not their style of hunting-ground."

"And what is their style, as you call it?"

"Oh, lots of high grass and jungle in a cattle country."

"Have you shot many tigers?"

"Two last month; my friend and I had rather good sport down in Travancora."

"I suppose you live out here?"

"No. I have only been about six months in the country."

"I wish I had been six months in India."

"May I ask why?"

"Certainly you may. Because I would be going home in six months more."

"And you only landed forty-eight hours ago! Surely you are not tired of it already. I thought all young ladies liked India. Mind where you are going! It is very dark here; will you take hold of my arm?"

"No, thank you," rather stiffly.

"Then my hand; you really had better, or you will come a most awful cropper, and trip over the sleepers."

"Here is an extraordinary adventure," said Honor to herself. "What would Jessie and Fairy say if they could see me now, walking along in the dark, through a wild, desolate country, hand in hand with an absolutely strange young man, whose face I have never even seen." A short distance ahead were groups of chattering natives,—women with red dresses and brass lotahs, which caught the light of their hand-lanterns (a lantern is to a native what an umbrella is to a Briton); turbaned, long-legged men, who carried bundles, lamps, and sticks. The line was bordered on either hand by thick hedges of grayish cactus; here and there glimmered a white flower; here and there an ancient bush showed bare, distorted roots, like the ribs of some defunct animal. Beyond stretched a dim, mysterious landscape, which looked weird and ghostly by the light of a few pale stars. The night was still and oppressively warm.

"You will be met at Allahabad, I suppose?" observed Honor's unknown escort, after a considerable silence.

"Yes, by my aunt."

"You must be looking forward to seeing her again?"

"Again! I have never seen her as yet." She paused, and then continued. "We are three girls at home, and

my aunt and uncle wished to have one of us on a visit, and I came."

"Not very willingly, it would seem," with a short laugh.

"No; I held out as long as I could. I am, or rather was, the useful one at home."

"And did your aunt and uncle stipulate for the most useful niece?"

"By no means; they—they, to tell you the truth, they asked for the *pretty* one, and I am not the beauty of the family."

"No? Am I to take your word for that, or are you merely fishing?"

"I assure you that I am not. I am afraid my aunt will be disappointed, but it was unavoidable. My oldest sister writes, and could not well give up what she calls her literary customers. My next sister is—is—not strong, and so they sent me, a *dernier ressort*."

She was speaking quite frankly to this stranger,—felt rather ashamed of her garrulity, but he had a pleasant voice, he was the first friendly soul she had come across since she had left home, and she was desperately homesick. A long, solitary railway journey had only increased her complaint, and she was ready to talk of home to *any one*,—would probably have talked of it to the Chuprassi if he could have understood her.

Her escort had been an unscrupulous, selfish little woman, whose nurse, having proved a bad sailor, literally saddled her good-natured, inexperienced charge with the care of two unruly children, and this in a manner that excited considerable indignation among her fellow-passengers.

"Why should you call yourself a *dernier ressort*?" enquired her companion, after a pause, during which they continued to stumble along, she holding timidly by the young man's arm.

"Because I am; and I told them at home, with my very last breath, that I was not a bit suited for coming out here and mixing with strangers,—nothing but strangers,—and going perpetually into what is called 'smart society,' and beginning a perfectly novel kind of life. I shall get into no end of scrapes."

"May I ask your reason for this dismal prophecy?"

"Surely you can guess. Because I cannot hold my tongue. I blurt out the first thing that comes into my head. If I think a thing wrong or odd I must say so; I cannot help it, I am incurable. People at home are used to it and don't mind. Also I have a frightful and wholly unconscious habit of selecting the most uncomfortable topics, and an extremely bad memory for the names and faces of people with whom I have but a slight acquaintance; so you see that I am not likely to be a social success."

"Let us hope that you take a gloomy view of yourself. For instance, what is your idea of an uncomfortable topic?"

"If I am talking to a person with a cast in the eye, I am positively certain ere long to find myself conversing volubly about squints; or if my partner wears a wig, I am bound to bring wigs on the tapis. I believe I am possessed by some mischievous imp, who enjoys my subsequent torture."

"Pray, how do you know that I have not a squint or a wig, or both? A wig would not be half a bad thing in this hot climate. To take off your hair, as you do your hat, would often be a great relief. Ah, here we are coming to the scene of the collision at last." And presently they passed by a long row of waggons, and then two huge engines, one across the line, the other reared up against it. An immense bonfire burnt on the bank, and threw the great black monsters into strong outline. Farther on they came to a gate and level



crossing. The gate of the keeper's hut stood wide open, and on the threshold a grey-haired old woman sat with her head between her knees, sobbing; within were moans, as if wrung from a sufferer in acute anguish. Honor's unknown companion suddenly halted, and exclaimed, impulsively,—

"I'm afraid some one has been badly hurt; if you don't mind I'll go and see."

Almost ere she had nodded a quick affirmative he had vaulted over the gate and left her.

CHAPTER XII.

"TWO GOOD SAMARITANS."

IN all her life the youngest Miss Gordon had never felt so utterly solitary or forsaken as now, when she stood alone on the line of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway. Before her the party of natives, with their twinkling lanterns, were gradually reaching vanishing point; behind her was a long, still procession of trucks and waggons that looked like some dreadful black monster waiting for its prey; on either hand stretched the greyish unknown mysterious landscape, from which strange, unfamiliar sounds, in the shape of croakings and cries, were audible. Oh, when would her nameless companion return? She glanced anxiously towards the hut; it was beyond the gate, and down a steep bank, away from the road; animated figures seemed to pass to and fro against the lighted open door. Ah! here came one of them, her escort, who had, in point of fact, been only absent five minutes, and not, as she imagined, half an hour.

"It is a stoker, who has been cut about the head and

badly scalded," he explained, breathlessly. "They are waiting for an apothecary from Okara, and, meanwhile, they are trying a native herb and a charm. They don't seem to do the poor chap much good. I think I might be able to do something better for him, though I have no experience beyond seeing accidents at foot-ball and out hunting; but I cannot leave you here like this, and yet I cannot well ask you inside the hut, the heat is like a furnace; and, altogether, it—it would be too much for you; but if you would not mind waiting outside, just for a few minutes, I'd get you something to sit on."

"Thank you, but I would rather go in; I have attended an ambulance class,—'first aid,' you know,—and perhaps I may be of some little use; there is sticking-plaster, eau de cologne, and a pair of scissors in my bag."

"Well, mind, you must brace up your nerves," he answered, as he pushed open the gate and led her down the crumbling sandy incline.

The heat inside the hut was almost suffocating. As the girl, following her guide, entered, every eye was instantly fixed upon her in wide surprise.

By the light of a small earthen lamp, which smoked horribly, she distinguished the figure of a man crouching on the edge of a charpoy; he was breathing in hard, hoarse gasps, and bleeding from a great gash above his eye.

A Eurasian in a checked cotton suit stood by talking incessantly, but doing nothing else. There were also present, besides the old woman, a veritable shrivelled up bag, two native men, possibly the "Bhaibands" or chums of the sufferer; in a corner a large black pariah sat watching everything with a pair of unwinking yellow eyes, and on another charpoy lay a still figure covered with a sheet. A few earthen chatties, a mat, a huka, and some gaudy English prints—for the most part nailed upside down—completed the picture. Hitherto, the travelling

companions had been to each other merely the embodiment of an undefined figure and a voice; the light of the little mud lamp, whose curling smoke threw outlines of dancing black devils on the walls, now introduced them for the first time face to face. To Honor Gordon stood revealed an unexpectedly good-looking young man, slight and well built, with severely cut features and a pair of handsome hazel eyes, which were surveying her gravely. A gentleman not merely in his speech and actions but in his bearing.

He, on his part, was not in the least surprised to behold a pale but decidedly pretty girl; by means of some mysterious instinct he had long made up his mind that the owner of such a delicate hand and sweet, clear voice could not be otherwise than fair to see.

"The apothecary cannot be here for one hour," explained the Eurasian, glibly. "He," pointing to the patient, "is very bad; we have put some herbs to his arm and the back of his head, but I, myself, think that he will die," he concluded, with an air of melancholy importance.

Some kind of a bandage was the first thing Honor asked for, and asked for in vain; she then quickly unwound the puggaree from her topee and tore it into three parts. Then she bathed and bandaged the man's head with quick and sympathetic fingers, whilst Jervis held the lamp, offered suggestions, and looked on, no less impressed than amazed; he had hitherto had an idea that girls always screamed and shrank away from the sight of blood and horrors.

This girl, though undeniably white, was as cool and self-possessed, as firm, yet gentle, as any capable professional nurse.

The scalded arm and hand—a shocking spectacle—were attended to by both; the great thing was to exclude the air and give the sufferer at least temporary relief.

With some native flour a bandage was deftly applied, the arm placed in a sling, and the patient's head was bathed with water and eau de cologne; fanned assiduously by the girl's fan he began to feel restored; he had been given heart, he had been assured that his hurts were not mortal, and presently he languidly declared himself better.

The natives who stood round whilst the Sahib and Miss Sahib ministered so quickly and effectually to their friend, now changed their lamentations to loud ejaculations of wonder and praise. Miss Gordon was amazed to hear her companion giving directions to these spectators in fluent and sonorous Hindustani, and still more astounded when, as she took up her topee preparatory to departure, the Eurasian turned to him and said in an impressive squeak,—

"Sir, your wife is a saint! An angel of goodness," and then as a hasty after-thought he added, "and beauty."

Before Jervis could collect his wits and speak she had replied,—

"I am not this gentleman's wife; we are only fellow-passengers. Why should you think so?" she demanded, sharply.

"Because—eh, *please* do not be angry—you looked so suitable," he answered with disarming candour. "Truly, I hope you may be married yet; and I wish you both riches, long life, and great happiness," he added, bowing very low, lamp in hand.

Honor passed out of the hut with her head held extraordinarily high, scrambled up the bank, and proceeded along the line at a head-long pace in indignant silence.

She now maintained a considerable distance between herself and her escort; no doubt her eyes were becoming accustomed to the dim light, and at any rate there was that in her air which prevented him offering either arm

or hand. In spite of the recent scene in which they had both been actors, where he had clipped hair and cut plaster, and she had applied bandages and scanty remedies to the same "case," they were not drawn closer together; on the contrary, they were much farther apart than during the first portion of their walk, and the young lady's confidences had now entirely ceased. She confined herself exclusively to a few bald remarks about the patient and the climate,—remarks issued at intervals of ten minutes,—and her answers to his observations were confined to yes and no. At last Okara station was reached, and, to tell the truth, neither of them was sorry to bring their *titte-d-tite* to a conclusion. The dazzling lights on the platform made their eyes blink as they threaded their way to the general refreshment-room, discovering it readily enough by sounds of many and merry voices, who were evidently availing themselves of its somewhat limited resources.

It was not a very large apartment, but it was full. The table was covered with a thin native table-cloth, two large lamps with punkah tops, and two cruet-stands, and an American ice-pitcher were placed at formal intervals down the middle. It was surrounded with people who were eating, drinking, and talking. At the farther end sat Captain Waring, supported on either hand by his two fair companions, three men—young and noisy officers—whom they evidently knew, and a prim, elderly woman who looked inexpressibly shocked at the company, and had pointedly fenced herself off from Mrs. Bellett with a teapot and a wine-card. Captain Waring's friends had not partaken of tea, as the champagne bottle testified, the tongue, cake, and fruit had also evidently received distinguished marks of their esteem. Mrs. Bellett put up her long eye-glass and surveyed exhaustively the pair who now entered.

"Hallo, Mark! What ages you have been!" exclaimed

his cousin. "We can make room at this corner; come along, old man."

Mark and his companion found themselves at the two corners at the end of the table, and were for the moment the cynosure of all eyes.

In a few seconds, as soon as the new-comers had been looked after and given the scraps, the party continued their interrupted conversation with redoubled animation. They all appeared to know one another intimately. Captain Waring had evidently fallen among old friends. They discussed people and places to which the others were strangers, and Mrs. Bellett was particularly animated and laughed incessantly, chiefly at her own remarks.

"And so Lalla Paake is going to her Aunt Ida! I thought Ida Langrishe *hated* girls. I wonder if she will be able to manage her niece, and what sort of a chaperon she will make?"

"A splendid one, I should say," responded a man in a suit like a five-barred gate. "On the principle of set a thief to catch a thief."

"And old Mother Brande, up at Shirani, is expecting a niece too. What fun it will be! What rivalry between her and Ida! what husband-hunting, and scheming, and match-making! It will be as good as one of Oscar Wilde's plays. I am rather sorry that I shall not be there to see. I shall get people to write to me,—you for one, Captain Waring." She nodded at him graciously.

Mark noticed his companion, who had been drinking water (deluded girl, railway-station water), put down her glass hastily and fix her eyes on Mrs. Bellett. No one could call her pale now.

"I wonder what Mrs. Brande's niece will be like?" drawled her sister. "I wonder if she, like her aunt, has been in domestic service? Ha, he, he!" she giggled, affectedly.

There was a general laugh, in the midst of which a clear treble voice was heard,—

"If you particularly wish to know, I can answer *that* question." It was the pale girl who was speaking. Mrs. Coote simply glared, too astounded to utter a syllable. "I was not aware that my aunt had ever been in domestic service; but I can relieve you at once of any anxiety about myself. I have never been in any situation, and *this* is the nearest approach I have ever made to the servants' hall!"

If the lamp in front of them had suddenly exploded there could scarcely have been more general consternation. Mrs. Bellett gasped like a newly-landed fish; Captain Waring, purple with suppressed laughter, was vainly cudgelling his brain for some suitable and soothing remark, when the door was flung back by the guard, bawling, "Take your seats,—take your seats, please,—passengers by the Cawnpore mail."

Undoubtedly the train had never arrived at a more propitious moment. The company rose with one consent, thrust back their chairs, snatched up their parcels, and hurried precipitately out of the room, leaving Honor and her escort *vis-à-vis* and alone.

"If those are specimens of English women in India," she exclaimed, "give me the society of the natives. That dear old creature in the hut was far more of a lady."

"Oh, you must not judge by Mrs. Bellett. I am sure she must be unique. I have never seen any one like her so far," he remarked, consolingly.

"I told you," becoming calmer, and rising as she spoke, "that I could not hold my tongue. I can not keep quiet. You see I have lost no time,—I have begun already! Of course the proper thing for me to have done would have been to sit still and make no remark, instead of hurling a bombshell into the enemy's camp. I have disgraced myself, and you. They will say, 'Evil communi-

cations corrupt good manners.' I can easily find a carriage. Ah, here is my treasure of a Chuprassi. You have been extremely kind, but your friends are waiting for you, and really you had better not be seen with me any longer."

She was very tall, and when she drew herself up their eyes were nearly on a level. She looked straight at him, and held out her hand with a somewhat forced smile.

He smiled also, as he replied, "I consider it an honour to be seen with you under any circumstances, and I shall certainly see you off. Our train is not leaving for five minutes. A ladies' compartment, I presume, and not with Mrs. Bellett."

They walked slowly along the platform, past the carriage in which Mrs. Bellett and her sister were arranging their animals and parcels with much shrill hilarity.

Miss Gordon was so fortunate as to secure a compartment to herself,—the imbecile Chuprassi gibbering and gesticulating whilst the sahib handed in her slender stock of belongings. As the train moved away she leant out of the window and nodded a smiling farewell.

How good-looking he was! as he stood under the lamp with his hat off. How nice he had been to her!—exactly like a brother. She drew back with a long breath, that was almost a sigh, as she said to herself, "Of course I shall never see him again."



CHAPTER XII.

TOBY JOY.

LETTER from Mrs. Brande, Allahabad, to Pelham Brande, Esqre., Shirani.

"DEAR P.,—She arrived yesterday, so you may expect us on Saturday. Send Nubboo down to Nath Tal Dāk-Bungalow on Thursday to cook our dinner, and don't allow him more than six coolies and one pony. Honor seems to feel the heat a great deal, though she is thin and not fat like me. At first sight, I must tell you, I was terribly disappointed. When I saw her step out of the railway-carriage,—a tall girl in a crumpled white dress with a hideous bazaar topes and no puggarie, her face very pale and covered with smuts,—I felt ready to burst into tears. She looked very nervous and surprised too. However, of course I said nothing; she wasn't to know that I had asked for the *pretty one*, and we drove back to the Hodsons, both in the very lowest spirits. She was tired; the train had broken down, and they had all to get out and walk miles in the middle of the night. After a while, when she had had her tea, and a bath, and a real good rest, and changed her dress, I declare I thought it was another person when she walked into the room. I found her uncommonly good-looking, and in five minutes' time she seemed really pretty. She has a lovely smile and teeth to match, and fine eyes, and when she speaks her face lights up wonderfully. Her hair is brown,—just plain brown, no colour in it, but thick and fine. I know you will be awfully disappointed in her complexion, as you were such a one for admiring a beautiful skin. She has not got any at all.

"Just a pale clear colour, and no more. Her figure is most beautiful; indeed, every time I look at her I notice something new,—now the shape of her neck, now her ears; all just so many models. She is, of course, a little shy and strange, but is simple and easily pleased, and, thank goodness, has no *grand airs*. I took her to Madame Peter (such stuff her calling herself Pierre) to order some gowns for dinner-parties. I thought of a figured yellow satin and a ruby plush,—she being dark; but she would not hear of them, and all she would take was a couple of cottons. I can see ab

wants to choose her own clothes, and that she would like to have a say in mine too, and knows a good deal about dress and fashions, and is clever at millinery (I always forget if there are two 'l's,' but you won't mind). She says she is fond of dancing and tennis, but cannot ride or sing, which is a pity.

"She has brought a fiddle with her, and she plays on it, she tells me. It reminds me of a blind beggar with a dog for coppers; but the Hodsons say it is all the go at home: they admire Honor immensely.

"I suppose Mrs. Langrishe's girl has arrived. I hear she is no taller than sixpence worth of half-pence, but the *biggest flirt* in India.

"Yours affectionately,

"SARABELLA BRANDE.

"P. S.—I hope Ben is well, and that he will take to her."

Honor had also written home announcing her arrival, dwelling on her aunt's kindness, and making the best of everything, knowing that long extracts from her letter would be read aloud to inquiring friends. She felt dreadfully homesick as she penned her cheerful epistle. How she wished that she could put herself into the envelope and find herself once more in that bright but faded drawing-room, with its deep window seats, cosy chairs, and tinkling cottage piano! Every vase and bowl would be crammed with spring flowers, Jessie would be pouring out tea, whilst her mother was telling her visitors that she had a nice long letter from Honor, who was in raptures with India, and as happy as the day was long!

She took particular care that her tears did not fall upon the paper as she penned this deceitful effusion. It was dreadful not to see one familiar face or object. This new world looked so wide and so strange. She felt lost in the immense bedroom in which she was writing, with its bare lofty walls, matted floor, and creaking punkah. A nondescript dog from the stables had stolen in behind one of the door-chicks. She called to it, eager to make friends. Surely dogs were dogs the whole world over!

but the creature did not understand what she said, simply stared interrogatively, and slunk away. She saw many novel sights as she drove in the cool of the evening in Mrs. Hodson's roomy landau along the broad planted roads of Allahabad, and watched the Bheesties watering the scorching white dust, which actually appeared to steam and bubble. She beheld rattling ekkas crammed with passengers, and drawn by one wicked-looking, ill-used pony; orderlies on trotting camels, fat native gentlemen in broughams, lean and pallid English Sahibs in dog-carts. It was extremely warm; the so-called "evening breeze" consisted of puffs of hot wind, with a dash of sand. Most of the Allahabad ladies were already on the hills.

Mrs. Brande was far too well-seasoned an Anglo-Indian not to appreciate the wisdom of travelling in comfort. She had her own servants in attendance, and plenty of pillows, fans, ice, fruit, and eau-de-Cologne. Far be it from her to journey with merely a hand-bag and parasol.

Honor, in a comfortable corner, with several down cushions at her back and a book on her knee, sat staring out on the unaccustomed prospect that seemed to glide slowly past the carriage windows. Here was a different country to that which she had already traversed. Great tracts of grain, poppies, and sugar-cane pointed to the principal products of the North-West. She was resolved to see and note everything,—even to the white water-fowl and the long-legged cranes who lounged among the marabes,—so as to be able to write full details in the next home letter.

As they passed through the Terai,—that breathless belt of jungle,—the blue hills began to loom largely into the view. Finally, the train drew up at a platform almost at the foot of them, and one phase of the journey was over.

Honor could not help admiring her aunt as she stepped out with an air that betokened that she was now monarch

of all she surveyed (she was encased in a cream-coloured dust-cloak and topees to match, and looked like an immense button mushroom). She briefly disposed of clamouring coolies, gave orders to her attendants in vigorous Hindustani, and led the way to the back of the station, where were a collection of long open boxes—each box had a seat, and was tied to two poles,—and all were assembled in the midst of a maddening din and accents of an unknown tongue. "We go in these jam-paus," explained Mrs. Brande, briskly.

"Get in, Honor, and I'll pack you up, tie on your veil, put your rug over your knees, and you will be very comfortable."

But Honor felt quite the reverse when she found herself suddenly hoisted up on men's shoulders and borne briskly away in the wake of her aunt, who seemed perfectly at home under similar circumstances.

For some time they kept to a broad metalled road lined with great forest-trees, then they went across a swing bridge, up a narrow steep path that twisted among the woods, overhanging the rocky bed of an almost dry river. This so-called bridle-path wound round the hills for miles; every sharp curve seemed to bring them higher. Now they encountered a drove of pack-ponies thundering down on their return journey to the plains,—miserably thin little beasts, who never seem to have time to eat, or, indeed, anything to eat if they *had* leisure. Mrs. Brande and her party met but few people, save occasionally some broad-shouldered coolie struggling upward with a huge load bound on his back, and looking like a modern Atlas. Once they passed a jaunty native girl riding a pony man fashion, and exchanging jibes and repartees with her companions; and once they met a European,—a young man dressed in flannels and a blazer, clattering down at break-neck speed, singing at the top of his voice, "Slattery's Mounted Foot." A

curly-headed, sunburnt, merry youth, who stopped his song and his steed the moment he caught sight of Mrs. Brande.

"Hullo!" he shouted. "Welcome back! Welcome the coming,—speed," laying his hand on his heart, "the parting guest."

"Where are you off to?" inquired the lady, imperiously.

"Only to the station. We are getting up grand theatricals, and in spite of coolies, and messages, and furious letters, none of our properties have been forwarded, and I began to suspect that the Baboo might be having a play of his own, and I am going down to look him up. Am I not energetic? Don't I deserve a vote of public thanks?"

"Pooh! Your journey is nothing," cried Mrs. Brande, with great scorn. "Why, I've been to Allahabad, where the thermometer is ninety-five in the shade."

"Yes, down in all the heat, and for a far more worthy object," glancing at Honor. "Rely on me, I shall see that you are recommended for a D.S.O."

"What an impudent boy you are!" retorted the lady, and, half turning her head, she said to her companion, "Honor, this is Mr. Joy; he is quite mad. Mr. Joy, this is my niece, Miss Gordon, just out from England" (her invariable formula). Mr. Joy swept off his topee to his saddle bow.

"And what's the news?" continued Mrs. Brande. "Has Mrs. Langrishe's niece come up?" she asked, peremptorily.

"Yes; arrived two days ago. The early bird, you see," he added, with a malicious twinkle of his little eyes.

"I don't see, and every one knows that the worm was a fool. What is she like?"

"Like a fairy, and dances to match," replied Mr. Joy, with enthusiasm.

"Come, come, what do you know about fairies? Is she pretty?"

"Yes; and full of life, and go, and chic."

"Cheek! I'm not surprised at that, seeing she is Mrs. Langrishe's own niece."

"Chic is a French word, don't you know, and means—well, I can't exactly explain. Anyway, Miss Paske will be a great acquisition."

"How?"

"Oh, you will soon be able to judge for yourself. She acts first-class, and plays the banjo like an angel."

"What nonsense you talk, Toby Joy! Who ever heard of an angel playing anything but a 'arp."

"By the way, Miss Gordon," said Toby, turning suddenly to her, "I hope you act."

"No; I have never acted in my life."

"Oh, that is nothing. All women are born actresses. Surely, then, you sing,—you have a singing face?"

"I am sorry to say that in that case my face belies me."

"Well, at any rate," with an air of desperation, "you could dance in a burlesque?"

"Get away!" screamed Mrs. Brande. "Dance in a burlesque! I am glad her mother does not hear you. Never mind him, Honor; he is crazy about acting and dancing, and thinks of nothing else."

"All work and no plays make Jack a dull boy," he retorted.

"Who else is up?" demanded Mrs. Brande, severely.

"Oh, the usual set, I believe,—Lloyds, Clovers, Valpys, Dashwoods, a signalling class, a standing camp, a baronet; there is also a millionaire just about half-way. You'll find a fellow called Waring at Nath Tal Dák Bungalow. He was in the service once, and has now come in for tons of money, and is a gentleman at large,—very keen about racing and sport. I expect he will live at our mess."

"Then he is not married?" said Mrs. Brande, in a tone of unaffected satisfaction.

"Not he! Perish the thought! He has a companion, a young chap he takes about with him,—a sort of hanger-on and poor relation."

"What is he like? Of course I mean the millionaire."

"Oh, of course," with an affable nod. "Cheery, good-looking sort of a chap, that would be an A1 hero of a novel."

Mrs. Brande glanced swiftly at Honor, and heaved a gentle sigh of contentment as she exclaimed,—

"Well, I suppose we ought to be moving on."

"Yes, for you will find the bungalow crammed with Tommies and their wives. Give the millionaire my love. *Adieu*, Mrs. Brande; *au revoir*, Miss Gordon. You'll think over the burlesque and help us in some way, won't you?" And with a valedictory wave of his hand he dashed off.

"He is a harmless lunatic, my dear," explained the aunt to her niece, as they were carried forward side by side. "Thinks of nothing but play-acting, and always in hot water with his colonel; but no one is ever really angry with Toby, he is such a mere boy."

"He must be three-and-twenty, and——"

"Look at the baggage just in front," interrupted Mrs. Brande, excitedly. "These must be Captain Waring's coolies." And to Honor's amazement she imperiously called a halt, and interrogated them sharply.

"Yes, for a Sahib,—two Sahibs at Nath Tal," grunted the hill men.

"What a quantity!" she cried, shamelessly passing each load in solemn review. "See what a lovely dressing-bag and a tiffin-basket. I believe," reckoning, "no less than five portmanteaus, all solid leather, Captain O. Waring; and look at the gun-cases, and that big box between two men is saddlery. I know the shape."

"Oh, Aunt Sara, do you not think we ought to get on?" urged her companion. "We are delaying his men."

"My dear child, learn to know that there is *nothing* a coolie likes better than being delayed. There is no hurry, and I am really interested in this young man. I want to see where he has been, where he has come from." In answer to an imperative sentence in a tongue unknown to Honor, a grinning coolie turned his back on which was strapped a portmanteau for Mrs. Brande's deliberate inspection.

It proved to be covered with labels, and she read aloud with much unction, and for Honor's benefit,—

"Victoria (that's New South Wales), Paris, Brindisi, Bombay Poonah, Arkomom, Calcutta, Galle, Lucknow,—bless us and save us, he has been staying at Government House, Calcutta, and been half over the world. See what it is to have money." And she made a sign to her Jampannis to continue her journey. Presently they passed two more coolies lightly loaded with a rather meagre kit; these she did not think it necessary to question.

"Those are the cousin's things," she explained, contemptuously; "M. J., the hanger-on. Awful shabby; only a bag and a couple of boxes; you could tell the owner was a poor man."

Honor made no reply. She began to have an idea that she had seen this poor young man before, or were two cousins travelling together for travelling's sake a common feature in India? It would not surprise her much were she to find her companion of that three-mile walk awaiting his slender baggage at Nath Tal Dāk Bungalow.

As Mrs. Brande was borne upwards, her spirits seemed to rise simultaneously with her body. She was about to make the acquaintance of a millionaire, and could cul-

tivate his friendship comfortably, undisturbed by the machinations of her crafty rival. She would invite him to be her guest for the two days; they would be journeying together, and by this means steal a nice long march (in every sense of the word) on Mrs. Langrishe!

CHAPTER XIV.

STEALING A MARCH.

As the sun died down the moon arose above the hills, and lighted the travellers along a path winding by the shores of an irregular mountain lake, and overhung by a multitude of cherry-trees in full blossom.

"Look!" cried Mrs. Brande, joyfully. "There in front you see the lights of the dāk-bungalow at last. You will be glad of your dinner, and I'm sure I shall."

Two men who sat in the verandah of the same rest-house would also have been most thankful for theirs. The straggling building appeared full of soldiers and their wives, and there seemed no immediate prospect of a meal. The kitchen had been taken possession of by the majestic cook of a Burra mem Sahib, who was shortly expected, and the appetites of a couple of insignificant strangers must therefore be restrained.

These travellers were, of course, Captain Waring and Mark Jervis, whom the former invariably alluded to as "his cousin." It was a convenient title, and accounted for their close companionship. At first Mark had been disposed to correct this statement, and murmur, "Not cousins, but connections," but had been silenced by Lawrence petulantly exclaiming,—

"Cousins and connections are the same thing. Who

cares a straw what we are? And what's the good of bothering?"

"I'm nearly mad with hunger," groaned Captain Waring. "I've eaten nothing for ten hours but one hard-boiled egg."

"Smoke, as the Indians do," suggested his comrade, unfeelingly, "or draw in your belt a couple of holes. Anyway, a little starvation will do you no harm,—you are getting fat."

"I wonder if I went and sat upon the steps with a placard round my neck, on which was written, 'I am starving,' if this good lady would give us a dinner? Hunger is bad enough, but the exquisite smell of her roast mutton aggravates my pangs."

"You have only to show yourself and she will invite you."

"How do you know, and why do you cruelly raise my hopes?"

"Because I hear that she is the soul of hospitality, and that she has the best cook on the hills."

"May I ask how you discovered this really valuable piece of information?"

"From that harum-scarum youth who passed this afternoon; he forgot to mention her name——"

"Here she comes along by the weir," interrupted Waring. "Mark the excitement among the servants. Her meal will be ready to the minute. She must be truly a great woman, and has already earned my respect; if she asks me to dinner I shall love her. What do you say, Mark?"

"Oh, I think, since you put it in that way, that I should find it easier to love the young lady!"

"I thought you fought shy of young ladies, and you must have cat's eyes if you can see one at this distance."

"I have the use of my ears, and I have had nothing to do

but concentrate my attention on what is evidently to be the only meal of the evening, and I heard the cook telling the khitmatghar to lay a place for the 'Miss Sahib.'

"What a thing it is to be observant!" cried Captain Waring. "And here they are. By George, she is a heavy weight!" alluding to Mrs. Brande, who was now let down with a dump that spoke a whole volume of relief.

The lady ascended the verandah with slow and solid steps, cast a swift glance at the famishing pair, and went into her own well-warmed room, where a table neatly laid and adorned with cherry blossoms awaited her.

"Lay two more places" were her first commands to the salaaming khitmatghar; then, to her niece, "I am going to ask those two men to dinner."

"But you don't know them, Aunt Sara!" she expostulated, rather timidly.

"I know of them, and that is quite enough at a dāk-bungalow. We are not so stiff as you are in England. We are all, as it were, in the same set out here; and I am sure Captain Waring will be thankful to join us, unless he happens to be a born idiot. In this bungalow there is nothing to be had but candles and jam. I know it of old; people who pass up are like a swarm of locusts, and leave nothing behind them but empty tins and bottles. Now, I can give him club mutton and champagne."

Having carefully arranged her dress, put on her two best diamond rings and a blue cap (N.B.—Blue had always been her colour), Mrs. Brande sailed out into the verandah and thus accosted the strangers,—

"I shall be very happy if you two gentlemen will dine with me in my rooms."

"You are really too good," returned Captain Waring, springing to his feet and making a somewhat exaggerated

bow. "We shall be delighted, for there seems no prospect of our getting anything to eat before to-morrow."

"You shall have something to eat in less than five minutes," was Mrs. Brande's reassuring answer, as she led the way to her own apartment.

"This," waving her hand towards Honor, "is my niece, Miss Gordon, just out from England. I am Mrs. Brande. My husband is in Council."

"We have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Gordon before," said Captain Waring. "This will not be the first time we have sat at the same table." And he glanced at her significantly.

"Yea," faltered Honor, with a heightened colour, as she bowed and shook hands with Mark. "This is the gentleman of whom I told you, Aunt Sara, who rescued me when I was left alone in the train."

"Ah, indeed!" said Mrs. Brande, sitting down as she spoke and deliberately unfolding her serviette. "I'm sure I'm greatly obliged to him." But she secretly wished that on that occasion Honor had been befriended by his rich associate.

"Let me introduce him to you, Mrs. Brande. His name is Jervis," said Captain Waring, with his most jovial air. "He is young, idle, and unmarried. My name is Waring. I was in the Rutlands, but I chucked the service some time ago."

"Well, now we know all about each other" (oh! de-luded lady), "let us begin our dinner," said Mrs. Brande. "I am sure we are all starving."

Dinner proved to be excellent, and included mahseer from the lake, wild duck from the marshes, and club mutton. No! Mrs. Brande's "chef" had not been over-praised. At first every one (especially the hostess and Clarence Waring) was too frankly hungry to talk, but after a time they began to discuss the weather, the local

insects, and their journey,—not in the formal manner common to Britons on their mournful travels, but in a friendly, homely fashion, suitable to a whitewashed apartment, with the hostess's bed in one corner.

Whilst the two men conversed with her niece, Mrs. Brande critically surveyed them,—“took stock,” as she said to herself. Captain Waring was a man of five or six-and-thirty, well set up, and soldierly-looking. He had dark cropped hair, bold merry eyes, and was handsome, though sunburnt to a deep tan, and his face was deeply lined,—those on his forehead looking as if they had been ruled and cut into the very bone; nevertheless, his habitual expression was as gay and animated as that of Toby Joy himself! He had an exceedingly well-to-do air, as if he had never known a money care in his life. He wore his clothes with ease; they fitted him admirably. His watch, studs, and linen were of the finest quality. Moreover, he appreciated a good dinner, seemed to accept the best of everything as a matter of course, and looked about intelligently for peppers and sauces, which were fortunately forthcoming.

“The companion,” as Mrs. Brande mentally called him, was a younger man,—in fact, a mere youth of about two-and-twenty, well set up, squarely built, with good shoulders, and a determined mouth and chin. He wore a suit of flannels, a silver watch with a leather chain, and looked exactly what he was,—an idle, poor, hanger-on!

Mrs. Brande left him to talk to Honor, and, indeed, entirely neglected him for his more important kinsman. Her niece was secretly aware of (and resented) her aunt's preference, and redoubled her efforts to entertain her slighted fellow traveller. She had a follow-feeling for him also. Were they not both dependents,—both poor relations?

“Well, Captain Waring, so you are coming up to see Shirani?” said Mrs. Brande, with her most gracious air.

“Yes; and I rather want to recall old times out here, and have a nice lazy summer in the hills.”

“Then you have been in India all winter?” (The inspection of his kit the crafty lady kept to herself.)

“Yes. We came out in October. Had a bit of a shoot in Travancore, and had a couple of months in Calcutta.”

“Then, perhaps, you came across a Miss Paske there? Though I don't suppose she was in the Government House set. Her uncle is a nobody.”

“To be sure, we know Miss Paske; don't we, Mark? She was very much in the Government House set. All the A.D.C.'s adored her. A little bit of a thing, with tow-coloured fluffy hair and a *nez retroussé*.”

“I know nothing about her nose or hair, but she is at Shirani now.”

“You don't say so! I am delighted to hear it. She is capital fun!”

Mrs. Brande's face fell. She sat crumbling her bread for some seconds, and then said abruptly,—

“Did you notice those monkeys on the way up?”

She had a peculiar habit of suddenly jumping from one topic to another,—figuratively at the opposite pole. She declared that her ideas travelled at times faster than her speech. Possibly she had her own consecutive, if rapid, train of thought, and may thus have connected Miss Paske with apes.

“Yes, swarms of those old grey fellows with black faces. I suppose they have a fair club at Shirani, and keep up the whist-room. Are there many men who play?”

“Only too many. I don't approve of cards,—at least gambling. I do love a game of whist; I play a half anna stamp on the rubber, just to give it a little interest.”

“Do they play high at Shirani,” he asked, with a touch of impatience.

“Yes, I believe they do; and that horrid old Colonel Sladen is the worst of all.”

"What! is he still up here? He used to play a first-class rubber."

"He will play anything,—high or low stakes,—at either night or day. He pays—his wife pays," concluded Mrs. Brande, looking quite ferocious.

"Oh, is she out again? Nice little woman."

"Out again! She has never been home yet." And she proceeded to detail that lady's grievances whilst her companion's roving eyes settled on his cousin and Miss Gordon.

She was a remarkable-looking, even fascinating girl; quite different to his impression of her at first sight. She had a radiant smile, wonderfully expressive eyes (those eyes alone made her beautiful, and lifted her completely out of the commonplaces), and a high-bred air. Strange that she should be related to this vulgar old woman, and little did the vulgar old woman guess how she had been championed by her English niece. The moon shining full on the lake tempted the whole party out of doors. Captain Waring made a basely ungrateful (but wholly vain) attempt to exchange ladies with his friend. Mrs. Brande, however, loudly called upon him to attend her, as she paced slowly down to the road; and as he lit his cigar at his cousin's, he muttered angrily under his moustache,—

"I call *this* beastly unfair. I had the old girl all dinner-time. You've got six to four the best of it!"

CHAPTER XV.

A PROUD MOMENT.

CAPTAIN WARING envied his comrade, who, with Miss Gordon, sauntered on a few paces ahead of him and what he mentally termed "his old woman of the sea." She never ceased talking, and could not endure him out of her sight! The others appeared to get on capitally, they had plenty to say to one another, and their frequent laughter excited not alone his envy but his amazement!

Mark was not a ladies' man; this squiring of dames was a new departure; such an avocation was far more in his own line, and by all the laws of the fitness of things *he* should be in Mark's place, strolling by moonlight with a pretty girl along the shores of this lovely mountain tarn. What were they talking about? Mark never could find much to say to girls. Straining his ears, not from the ungentlemanly wish to listen, but merely from pure friendly curiosity, he paid but scant attention to Mrs. Brande's questions and gave her several misleading answers.

"His cousin had no profession, he was a gentleman at large; yes, his *protégé*, yes. He himself was a man of leisure; yes, yes, yes, yes." He said yes to everything indiscriminately; it is so easy to say yes.

"It is strange that we should come across one another twice on the same journey," remarked Jervis to his companion.

"If you had not come across me the first time, I suppose I should be sitting in that train still."

"Oh, no; not quite so long as all that."

"You won't say anything to aunt about——"

"Good gracious, Miss Gordon! do you think I look like a lunatic?"

"You see, I have such a dreadful way of coming out with things, that I imagine that what is an irresistible temptation to me might be the same to other people."

"You need not be afraid, as far as I am concerned. I can answer for myself that I can hold my tongue. And how are you getting on? Still counting the hours until your departure?" with an air of gay interrogation.

"No, indeed. At first I was homesick, but I am getting over that now."

And gradually she was led on to talk of Jessie's stories, of their celebrated mulberry-tree, and of the various quaint local characters. Surely there was some occult influence in the scene, or was it the frank air and pleasant voice of this young man that thus unlocked her lips? She felt as if she had known him quite a long time; at any rate he was her first acquaintance in India, and she once more repeated to herself the comforting fact that he was also a poor relation; that alone was a strong bond of sympathy. As they paced the narrow road that edged the lake of Nath Tal they laughed and talked with a mutual enjoyment that filled the mind of Captain Waring and Mrs. Brande (who were not so happily paired) with dismay on the part of the lady and disgust on the side of the gentleman. Captain Waring would no doubt have found their conversation insipid to the last degree: it contained no sugared compliments, and not the smallest spice of sentiment or flirtation.

"I have a bargain to propose to you two gentlemen," said Mrs. Brande ere they parted for the night. "We are going the same marches and to the same place; I shall be happy to provide the commissariat if you will be our escort and protect us. What do you say?" appealing to Captain Waring with a smirk.

"My dear madam, I say that we close with your offer

on the spot; it is altogether in our favour," was his prompt reply.

Mrs. Brande beamed still more effulgently. There was no occasion to consult the other young man.

"Then we will consider it all settled: it is a bander-bust." And taking Honor's arm, she nodded quite an affectionate good-night and retired into her own quarters.

Precisely at six o'clock the next day the party made a start, the men on sturdy hill ponies, the ladies in dandies. What can be more exquisite than a clear April morning on the lower slopes of the Himalayas? The lake was still and lay half in shadow, the dew glittered among the cherry-blossoms as if they were set in diamonds, the low rush-covered marshes were sprinkled with herds of cattle, and the doves were cooing in the dense woods that overlooked the misty blue plains. The travellers encountered many groups of hill folk going to work among the cultivated patches lower down, or in the neighbouring tea-gardens, as they passed through a village, a flock of delightful little brown children sallied out and tossed freshly-plucked monthly roses into the ladies' laps. "So charmingly Arcadian and simple," thought Honor; but she was disillusioned by the same little brown elves pursuing them for half a mile with shrill demands for "Bucksheesh, bucksheesh!"

As they toiled upwards the day grew perceptibly warmer, the ascent steeper. At twelve o'clock they halted by a mountain stream under some evergreen oaks and there found an excellent repast awaiting them. Mrs. Brande's portly cook had girded up his loins and hastened by short cuts and by-paths, and now lay in ambush with this welcome repast of fowl, cold pie, rolls, and coffee,—claret and hock were cooling in a neighbouring stream.

There was some satisfaction in being escort to Mrs. Brande, who sat on a box presiding over the table-cloth

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and looking the embodiment of gratified hospitality. When the meal had come to an end and the men were smoking, she said,—

"What's that in your dandy, Honor? I see you taking as much care of it as if it was some great treasure. Not your new hats, I hope?" in a tone of real concern.

"No, aunt; it is my violin,—a much more important affair."

"Nonsense, child. Why did you not leave it with the heavy baggage?"

"Because it might have been smashed."

"Well, if it was, it could be mended. We have a very clever Maistry carpenter at Shirani. I often give him little jobs. My butler—a Goanese—has a fiddle, too, and of an evening I hear him giving the other servants a benefit."

"Perhaps he and I may play duets," remarked Honor, demurely.

"My dear child!" with a deeply horrified air. "How can you talk in such a wild way! Captain Waring is shocked, ain't you, captain?"

"Dreadfully scandalised; and I will only condone the outrage to my feelings on one condition, that Miss Gordon plays us a solo. Will you, Miss Gordon? This is the hour and the place."

Mrs. Brande naturally expected that her niece would require at least a quarter of an hour's incessant pressing; and, indeed, in spite of what the Hodsons had told her, this benighted old person was not at all sure that it was the correct thing for a woman to play the fiddle. Would Mrs. Langrishe allow her girl to do it? And visions of her own fat black butler squatting outside the house in the cool of the day playing jigs and reels to a circle of enraptured Syces and Chuprasals rose before her mind's eye.

This vision was quickly dispelled by another. Honor longed for the sound of her beloved violin, her present audience was not formidable, and she was not the least nervous. Last time she had held her fiddle and bow it had been a dull, wet afternoon at home, a type of the worst grey, sullen, English weather. She had played to them in the drawing-room Schubert's *Adieu*; yes, and her mother had wept. Now, what a different scene, and different listeners! Two men—almost strangers—prone on the grass, lazily expectant, and, as far as Captain Waring was concerned, condescendingly ready to be entertained. A stout lady sitting on a wine-case with her napkin on her knee and her topce quite at the back of her head, a distant group of scarlet- and white-clad servants, and all around a scene fit to encircle Orpheus himself. Range after range of purple blue hills rising out of rhododendron and oak forests, a rival across the valley in the shape of a cuckoo, otherwise a waiting, sympathetic silence.

As the girl took the violin out of its case, Captain Waring could see that it was in hands that loved it, and noted, moreover, that the said hands were beautiful, the wrists most daintily modelled. Soon the bow began to call forth heavenly sounds.

Honor stood up, leaning carelessly against the trunk of a tree, and seemed wholly unconscious of her audience; her face, which was turned towards the hills, gradually assumed a rapt, exalted expression, and her playing was in keeping with her attitude and her eyes. The performance was a revelation, a mixture of great simplicity with a distinct note of human passion in its strain. Surely the music was the voice of this girl's sweet soul.

The servants boldly came near to hear this new "*Miss Sahib*" who drew such marvellous strains from the "*Sitar*." The very ponies pricked their ears, a ram-

bling hill oow halted to listen, the competitive cuckoo was dumb.

The two young men gradually dropped their cigarettes. Mrs. Brande dropped her jaw. Why, her niece played as well as a man at a concert! Only better, in her opinion, for this was a tune that touched her, and that she could understand,—those sweet wailing notes, resembling a human voice, penetrated even her opaque sensibilities, and wafted her to the very gates of Paradise!

Captain Waring surveyed with unaffected curiosity this fair young musician, with his elbows dug into the grass, his chin resting on his hands. He knew something about music; the girl played with faultless taste and absolute purity of tone. He was listening to "linked sweetness long drawn out" rendered with truly expressive charm. Here was not the common or ordinary Indian spin, but a modern Saint Cecilia! He glanced at Mark to see how this unexpected transformation had affected him! But Mark's face was averted, and he gave no sign, though in reality he was enjoying a debauch of exquisite musical thoughts.

Presently the spell—a weird Russian air—died away in a long sobbing sigh, and save for a murmur among the servants there ensued quite a remarkable pause, broken at length by Mrs. Brande, who exclaimed as if she had suddenly awoke,—

"Very pretty indeed! And how did you like it Captain Waring?"

"Like it!" he echoed, indignantly. "My dear madam, what a feeble and inadequate expression! Miss Gordon plays magnificently."

"Oh, indeed, no," she protested. "I can play music that I can feel, and that is easy, and I began to learn the violin when I was four years old, so that my fingers are pretty supple; but when I think of other people's play-

ing, such as Sarasate, I realise that I am nothing more than a well-meaning amateur, and never will be otherwise. I cannot master any excessive technical difficulties. I have no brilliancy. Still," with a happy little sigh, "I am glad that you liked it."

"Yes, my dear," said her aunt, nodding her head approvingly. "And now let us have something lively. Suppose you play a polka?"

But the violin was already in its case. Honor had laid it there with the air of a mother consigning an infant to its rest.

"Oh, Miss Gordon, what a shame!" cried Mark Jervis. "I could lie on this sunny slope, under the rhododendrons, listening to you for days."

"You would not find it very comfortable in the rains," remarked Mrs. Brande with some asperity. She did not approve of penniless young men thus launching compliments at her accomplished niece. "And now we had better be getting on if we are to reach Binea before dark."

The next and last day of their march the party was proceeding as usual in pairs: Honor and Captain Waring led the van, whilst Jervis and Mrs. Brande, who was a heavy load, lagged behind. The farther they journeyed the steeper grew the precipices, the wilder the scenery, the narrower the paths. At one place in the woods high above them grazed a herd of so-called tame buffaloes,—tame with natives, wild with Europeans. The huge bull, with his hairy head and enormous horns,—though he carried a bell,—was tame with no one. Hearing strange voices below, he lifted up his hideous china-blue eyes and stared fiercely about him, and then came crashing down hill for some dozen yards; but his prey—Honor and her escort—had already passed by and were out of reach. He stood still in a meditative attitude, and gave vent to an angry and disappointed bellow.

After a considerable interval another group came into

view. Mrs. Brande's gay Jampannis and scarlet dandy rug settled the question. In half a moment he had blundered through the undergrowth and placed himself in a warlike attitude upon the path,—exactly six yards ahead of the party. The unanimity with which Mrs. Brande's bearers dropped her and fled up trees was only equalled by the agility displayed by the lady herself in leaping out of the dandy and scrambling down the khud! Nothing remained on the track but the empty vehicle, the buffalo, and—Jervis.

He promptly jumped off his pony, snatched up a Jampanni's pole, on the end of which he raised the red rug, and boldly advanced like a matador in the arena. When the bull lowered his ponderous head to charge he threw the rug over his horns with as much coolness and dexterity as if he had merely to deal with a stuffed animal! But this animal was very much alive. Rushing furiously forward, he tumbled blindly over the dandy, and with a loud crash rolled down the khud, which, luckily for him (and Mrs. Brande), was not of sheer descent. The lady's piercing screams attracted the notice of her niece and, of what was far more to the purpose, the boy who was in charge of the herd. Probably he had been fast asleep, but he now came racing through the brushwood, routed up the buffalo, whose fall had undoubtedly quenched his spirit, and drove him away, laden with the hearty curses of the Jampannis. These valiant gentlemen had now descended to mother earth as brave as lions. The rug was in ribbons, the dandy in match-wood, but no one was injured. "What was to be done?" enquired Captain Waring, vainly struggling to preserve a grave countenance as he saw Mrs. Brande—who presented a truly distressing spectacle—emerging from the bushes on her hands and knees. The back of her dress was split right across the shoulders, her veil hung round her neck, and she was covered with sand and bits of twigs.

Mark had hastened to her assistance, and her niece, as she picked up her topee and umbrella, asked anxiously "if she was hurt?"

"No," she panted, sitting down and dusting herself with her handkerchief, "I'm not a bit the worse."

"But your dandy is in smithereens!" said Captain Waring. "What is to be done?"

"I know what *has* been done, young man," solemnly addressing herself to Jervis. "You saved my life, as sure as I sit here and you stand there. If you had not had the courage to throw the rug over his head, he would have come down the khud and gored me to death. I'm not a woman of many words" (fond delusion), "but I won't forget it,—nor will P." In moments of unusual excitement, or when with her intimates, she invariably spoke of her husband as "P."

"Oh, Mrs. Brande," he replied, "you think a great deal too much of it,—it was only a buffalo."

"Only a buffalo!" she repeated. "You little know them. In another minute I'd have been only a corpse! They are the most dangerous brutes you can come across, and so cunning. Oh," changing her voice to another and sharper key,—

"Jait Sing, you base coward! I shall cut every one's pay two rupees. I've a mind to stop your wood tickets. What a contrast to you!" as she pointed her fat finger straight at Jervis. "Lions, indeed! as all these Sings call themselves. Pretty lions! You are the bravest young man I ever saw!"

"Oh, come, I say, Mrs. Brande," expostulated Waring, playfully, "you don't know what I could do if I tried."

"Well, as you did not try, I cannot say," she answered, drily.

"It's not such a marvellous feat driving off an old buffalo——"

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"Depends upon the humour the buffalo is in; and I'm

surprised at you belittling your own cousin, instead of being proud of him," pursued the lady with considerable heat, and entirely forgetting her intended rôle with respect to this millionaire!

"How are you to get on, aunt?" enquired Honor. "But of course you must go in my dandy, and I can walk."

"By no means, Miss Gordon,—you shall ride my pony," said Captain Waring. "He has a grand roomy old saddle and a fine broad back, and I will hold you from slipping off."

To this arrangement Mrs. Brande (who had now recovered her composure and her wits) saw no objection. Quite the contrary, it was a capital idea. As for herself, she felt so shattered and so nervous that she could not allow Mr. Jervis out of her sight.

They were now within seven miles of Shirani, and oh, what interminable miles!—they seemed leagues, leagues of dreary monotonous road, winding and twisting round barren, fawn-coloured hills, and apparently taking them straight into the very heart of Asia. They wound up and down valleys to the crest of a range, which hid, as they fondly hoped, long-looked-for Shirani. Alas! it but gave them a view of yet another valley,—yet another rounded hill slope. Honor was not surprised to hear that a lady of her aunt's acquaintance, on her first visit, had, after a series of these maddening disappointments, collapsed on the journey, and given way to a storm of hysterical tears. Sometimes Honor walked,—walked by preference; but at others she mounted the pony in deference to her chaperon's wishes. She did not enjoy her ride; it consisted of a gradual slide, slide, slide, a recover, then slide, slide, again. She declined Captain Waring's eagerly tendered arm,—support was twice as irksome as walking. Would this detestable road never, never, come to an end?

Ah, there were the pine-trees of Shirani at last! In another twenty minutes they were among them. As the little party debouched into the mall,—Mrs. Brande heading the procession, Honor bringing up the rear, with Captain Waring leading her pony,—they came face to face with Mrs. Langrishe, walking with her most stately air between a soldierly-looking man and a small, beautifully-dressed, fair-haired girl.

Yes, she could not have failed to notice and take in the full significance of Mrs. Brande's *reentrée* (indeed she and her rival had exchanged bows), and dusty, hot, and thirsty as that lady was, this was one of the happiest and proudest moments of her life!

CHAPTER XVI.

A MESSAGE FROM MISS PASKE.

ALTHOUGH she had only caught a fleeting vision of Mrs. Brande's niece, Mrs. Langrishe had sharp eyes, and one glance had been sufficient to assure her that the girl was not the least like what she had expected. She was slim and dark, and though covered with dust and wearing a frightful one rupee topee, undeniably a lady, and not at all of the dairy-maid type.

And how exultant the old woman had looked! Literally puffed out with pride as she was carried past, with the millionaire in close attendance. Not that *that* detail was of the slightest consequence. Lalla knew him intimately, and she would get her to write him a nice, friendly little note and ask him to drop in to tea.

Meanwhile, Honor had been presented to her uncle, who, far from being disappointed, was agreeably sur-

prised to find that she was the image of his favourite sister, Hester, who had died when she was eighteen. This resemblance (which he kept to himself) ensured the new arrival an immediate *entrée* to her uncle's good graces, and Mrs. Brande, accustomed to his cool and rather cynical manner, was amazed at the warmth of the reception he accorded to his hitherto unknown niece.

For several days the young lady was kept at home in strict seclusion until her complexion had recovered the journey and her boxes had arrived from the railway. Her aunt was determined not to submit her treasure to the fierce gaze which beats upon a newly-arrived girl until she was altogether at her best. She, however, could not close her doors to numerous ladies who came to call upon Miss Gordon and thus secure an early and private view. Honor was compelled to sit in state in a hideous drawing-room—where every colour was shouting at another—and listen to her aunt telling visitors how beautifully she played the fiddle, and what long hair she had, and how she took threes in shoes, and how useful she was in the house already. Also, she did not spare them full particulars of the buffalo adventure, nor fail to sing loud praises of Mr. Jervis, or to enlarge on his cousin's agreeable escort and particular attentions *en route*. Then Mrs. Brande discussed her servants and the outrageous price of ghee and charcoal.

"Come, let us sit in the verandah," whispered Mrs. Sladen, who had read the girl's expressive face. "You will get quite used to it," she continued when they were outside; "you will do it yourself some day. We all do; but you will have a very happy home here in spite of the price of potatoes. Your aunt is delighted with you, as you may see, and you will soon have plenty of topics to discuss. She has been lonely enough till now. She and Mr. Brande, although much attached to one another, have few similar tastes in common. He is fond

of literature and devoted to tennis and rackets, and although he is older, he is so active that he seems years her junior. Your coming has given her a fresh start and new pleasures; she is a dear, good woman, and as single-hearted as a little child."

Mrs. Sladen and Honor had taken to one another at once. Honor had been down after dusk to Mrs. Sladen's house, been presented to Colonel Sladen, and shown the photographs of Mrs. Sladen's little girls, Charlotte and Mabel, and had heard their last letters, a proof that she was in high favour with their mother. Honor was not accustomed to sitting with her hands before her, and promptly found occupation in various ways. She ran messages, wrote notes and orders, arranged flowers, and ventured on respectful suggestions with regard to the drawing-room,—a fine apartment, expensively furnished in the worst taste imaginable, a supreme contrast to Mrs. Langrishe's room, which was the prettiest in Shirani. People little suspected how that leisurely lady dusted it entirely herself, shook out draperies, arranged flowers, and washed the china ornaments with her own delicate hands. Her room, as she understood it, made an effective background for herself, and she spared no pains to frame Ida Langrishe in the most becoming fashion. The floor was covered with fine old prayer rugs, the tables were strewn with curios, the walls hung with valuable water-colours, and scattered at suitable intervals were inviting arm-chairs.

Ill-natured people assured one another that the Persian rugs, carvings, and silver bowls were all so many offerings from "men." Even so, "Mrs. Langrishe would have been the first to admit" presents to Granby and myself. "Colonel Greene, a dear old thing, brought us the carpet from Peshawar, and Mr. Goodhoose sent those silver things from Delhi. I must say that our friends never forget us."

Mrs. Langrishe, as we know, had fully determined to hand over the drawing-room to her niece; it would be such good practice for the child, and really the flowers took up an hour every morning. She could find many ways of making Lalla useful. But that young lady steadily objected to these plans; she immediately made her aunt aware that she considered herself merely ornamental. "Oh, dear, no! she never arranged flowers; she had no taste in that line; and, besides, it would spoil her hands. *Dust* the drawing-room; dear Aunt Ida must be joking; why, that was the bearer's business. Get out the dessert; oh," with a peal of ringing laughter, "she was not to be trusted. She would eat every chocolate and all the best French sweets!"

So whilst Mrs. Langrishe laboured as usual over her household tasks, her fair niece, with a locked door, lay upon her bed reading a novel, or tried new experiments in the hair-dressing line, or wrote notes. No, no; she had not come to Shirani to be a lady-help. She had always heard that her Aunt Ida was very *clever*, but luckily she had her wits about her also.

During Honor Gordon's period of enforced retirement she went early every morning for a solitary walk along a pretty sandy road that wound among the dark aromatic pine woods, a road with sharp angles and deep leafy ravines green with ferns and ivy. It was early in May, and the ground was strewn with pine-needles, which deadened the footfall, the firs were thin and bare, and through their dark branches she caught glimpses of the snows, that like a great white rampart hung in mid-air between a brilliant blue sky and an opal-tinted mist. Honor enjoyed these morning rambles immensely, though she rarely met a soul save a Syce exercising a horse, or an Ayah wheeling a perambulator. Her sole companion was "Ben," who luckily had "taken to her," and with whom she had established relations of such a

friendly character that she had actually been installed in the unexpected position of his "aunt!"

Occasionally they made joint excursions down the khud, he in search of the private larders of other dogs, she in quest of ferns and moss for table decoration. Ben was a personage of such importance at Rookwood that he demands half a chapter to himself. He was a dog with fixed opinions, and hated Mrs. Langrishe and one or two other people in the same degree that he hated cold boiled meat. Sport was his passion, the chewing up of suede gloves his weakness. He was a fox-terrier with a history. As a pup, he had been presented by a man to a girl, on the principle of "love me love my dog," but, alas, the false maiden had loved neither one nor other; she heartlessly jilted the man and abandoned the dog to his fate. However, her Ayah (prudent soul) ere she went down the hill sold the pup to a Bheestie for the sum of two annas (an ancient debt). He happened to be Mrs. Brande's servant, and was excessively vain of his purchase, and left him most of the day tied by a strip of pink calico to a conspicuous tree in her compound, where he suffered him to "eat the air" and but little else. Mrs. Brande *en route* to feed her well-to-do fowls noticed the famishing animal, and as she often throw him a crust, he naturally hailed her advent with extravagant demonstrations of delight and feeble yelps of joy. Her easily-softened heart was touched by the raptures of the starving puppy, and after some parley she bought him from the Bheestie for the sum he swore he had paid—to wit, ten rupees—in order to feed him up and get him a good master. But Ben was thoroughly satisfied with his present quarters, and soon made himself completely at home. He displayed an easy intimacy with arm-chairs and cushions; he had undoubtedly been accustomed to sweet biscuits and to good society, and his mistress pointed out with just pride that he under-

stood English perfectly. Of course, she eventually adopted "Ben;" he made himself indispensable, he refused to be separated from his patroness and became her shadow, and soon ceased to be a shadow himself. He grew from a dirty, starving, shivering whelp into an extremely handsome dog with a fine gloss on his coat. Did he ever remember his own evil days as he lounged of an afternoon sunning himself at the gate of Rookwood and passed in scornful review curs less happy and of low degree? Are dogs snobs?

Whether snob or not, Ben was brave: he lowered his tail to none; and when the big wild-cat that created such havoc among the poultry went to ground under the mess-house, Ben Brande, as he was called, was the only one of the assembled mob of terriers who, as a looker-on expressed it, "was man enough to follow him, kill him, and drag him out." Ben Brande lost an eye thereby, but gained a magnificent reputation.

Of course Ben was spoiled, his mistress talked to him incessantly, he had his own little charpoy in her room, his morning tea in her company, and now and then he was permitted to invite his pal, "Jacko," a red terrier, to dine and spend the day; once they had elected to spend it quietly in Mr. Brande's dressing-room, where they devoured several pairs of boots, a sponge-bag, and the back of "Nancy." Ben escorted his mistress in her walks and drives, many a time she went out solely on his account, and it was an indisputable fact that he had favourite roads, and his "grandmamma," as the infatuated lady called herself, always studied his wishes. On those occasions when "his grandpapa and grandmamma" were dining abroad he never went to bed, but established himself at the entrance until their return (however late), and passers-by could always tell that the Brandes were at a "Burra Khana" when they saw an upright little white figure sitting by the gate-post.

Indeed, it was whispered that the reason Mrs. Brande was always so early to depart was simply that she did not like to keep Ben waiting up. She never said so, but every one knew that Ben was the real motive for her premature departure. And this was the animal who now accompanied Honor and who had accorded her his patronage and friendship. One morning, as they were strolling homewards, he with a large stone in his mouth and she carrying an armful of ferns, they nearly came into collision with another couple—the angles were abrupt—walking noiselessly on pine-needles. They proved to be Toby Joy, who was also attended by a dog, and sauntering along hand-in-hand with a young lady, a dainty, white-skinned little person with fluffy light hair, small keen eyes, admirably arched brows, and a tip-tilted nose.

Honor was by far the most embarrassed of the trio, and blushed a good healthy blush, of which she was heartily ashamed. Why should not other people enjoy the delicious morning air? As to walking hand-in-hand, she ought to be the last person to object: had she not walked hand-in-hand herself with an absolute stranger?

"Good-morning, Miss Gordon," said Toby, slowly relinquishing Miss Paske's fingers and doffing his cap. "So you have got up here all right in spite of the buffalo! Let me introduce you to Miss Paske."

The girls bowed and looked at one another gravely.

"We are getting up that burlesque I told you about, and have come out early to study our part together."

"How praiseworthy of you!" said Honor, in simple good faith. "And what is the piece to be?"

"The Babes in the Wood," responded Miss Paske, with an odd smile, and, looking Honor over with her bright little eyes, "Don't you think it will be suitable to the dear simple people at Shirani?"

"I really don't know," replied the other, with a puzzled face.

"Well, I hope you will come to see it." And, with a patronising nod, she moved on. But Ben and Jumbo (Mrs. Langrishe's dog) were not disposed to part thus. The household feud had evidently extended to them. They had been tiptoeing round one another for some time with considerable stiffness in their gait, emitting low and insulting growls that now culminated in a sort of gurgling snarl as they flew at one another's throats. Miss Paske gave a little stifled shriek and scrambled hastily up the bank, whilst Honor and Toby made desperate attempts to separate the combatants. They each caught hold of a dog by whatever came first, leg or tail; but the dogs refused to be parted, and to and fro and up and down they struggled and scrambled in a mutual frenzy. Meanwhile, Lalla, who was now at a safe elevation, actually appeared delighted at the performance, and laughed and clapped her hands ecstatically. At last, by the expedient of pouring sand on their heads, the dogs were choked off, and each side was bottle-holder to a furious, panting, struggling animal.

"I think we had better separate at once," said Honor, who held Ben with the greatest difficulty.

"Yes, the sooner the better," gasped Toby, who was also wrestling with an eager armful.

As Honor turned homewards, with Ben hanging longingly over her shoulder, Miss Paske, who had tripped down from her coign of vantage, called after her in her sweetest, clearest tones,—

"Be sure you tell Mrs. Brande that her dog got the worst of it."

CHAPTER XVII.

"TAKE A FRIEND'S ADVICE."

SARABELLA BRANDE was a proud woman as she concluded an inspection of her niece ere the young lady started to make her first appearance in public. There was not a fault to be found in that fresh white dress, pretty hat, neat gloves, and parasol,—except that she would have liked just a bit more colour; but what Honor lacked in this respect her aunt made up generously in her own person,—in the shape of a cobalt blue silk heavily trimmed with gold embroidery, and a vivid blue and yellow bonnet. Two rickshaws were in attendance,—a grand new one on india-rubber tires, and four gaudy Jampannis, all at the "Miss Sahib's" service. Mrs. Brande led the way, bowling down the smooth club road at the rate of seven miles an hour, lying back at an angle of forty-five degrees, her bonnet-feathers waving triumphantly over the back of her vehicle. The club was the centre, the very social heart, or pulse, of Shirani. It contained rooms for reading, writing, dancing, for playing cards, or billiards, or for drinking tea.

Outside ran a long verandah lined with ill-shaped wicker chairs, and overlooking the tennis courts and gardens, and commanding a fine view of the snows.

The six tennis courts were full, the band of the Scorpions was playing the last new gavotte when Mrs. Brande walked up with her head in the air, closely followed by her niece and Captain Waring. She felt that every eye—and especially Mrs. Langrishe's eye—was on her, and was fully equal to the occasion! Mrs. Langrishe, faultlessly attired in a French costume, and looking the pict-

ure of elegant fastidiousness, murmured to her companion, Sir Gloster Sandilands,—

"Not a bad-looking girl,—really, not at all unpresentable! but allow." And she smiled with deadly significance, little supposing that her faint praise attracted the Baronet to Honor on the spot. Then she rose, and rustled down with much frow-frowning of silken petticoats, and accosted her rival with expressions of hypocritical delight.

"Where have you been?" she enquired. "We thought you were in quarantine; but when I look at you I need not ask how you are? Pray introduce your niece to me. I hope she and Lalla will be immense allies." As she spoke she was closely scrutinising every item of Honor's appearance, and experiencing an unexpected pang.

The girl was a lady; she had a graceful figure and a bright clever face, and the old woman had not been suffered to dress her! Even her captious eye could find no fault in that simple toilet.

"How do you do, Miss Gordon?" she said. "Had you a good passage out?"

"Yes, thank you."

"You came out in the 'Arcadia,' and most likely with a number of people I know,—the Greys, the Bruces, the Lockyers."

"No doubt I did. There were three hundred passengers."

"And no doubt you had a very good time, and enjoyed yourself immensely."

"No; I cannot fancy any one enjoying themselves on board ship," rejoined Honor, with a vivid recollection of fretful children to wash and dress and keep out of harm's way.

"Oh!" with a pitying, half-contemptuous smile, "seek the whole way?"

Honor shook her head.

"Well, I see you won't commit yourself," with a play-

ful air, "but I shall hear all about you from the Greys." And she nodded significantly, as much as to say, "Pray do not imagine that any of your enormities will be hidden from me!"

"Lalla!" to her niece, who was the centre of a group of men, "come here and be introduced to Miss Gordon."

Lalla reluctantly strolled forward with the air of a martyr.

"I think we have met before," said Honor frankly, extending her hand.

Miss Paske stared with a sort of blank expression, and, elevating her eyebrows, drawled,—

"I think not." But she also made a quick little sign.

Unfortunately for her, she had to deal with a girl who could not read such signals, who answered in a clear, far-carrying voice,—

"Oh, don't you remember? I met you the other morning before breakfast up among the pine woods. You were walking with Mr. Joy. Surely you recollect how desperately our dogs fought?"

Lalla felt furious with this blundering idiot, and hated her bitterly from that day forth.

Mrs. Langrishe was made aware of Lalla's early promenade for the first time, and her lips tightened ominously. She did not approve of these morning *tit-a-tits* with an impecunious feather-head like Toby Joy.

"Ah, yes, now that you mention it, I do recollect," responded Miss Paske, with an air which implied that the fact of the meeting required a most exhaustive mental effort. "But you were in dishabille, you see" (this was a malicious and mendacious remark), "and you look so very different when you are dressed up! How do you think you will like India?"

"It is too soon to know as yet."

"I see you have the bump of caution," with a little

sneer. "Now, I make up my mind to like or dislike a place or a person on the spot. I suppose you are fond of riding?"

"I have never ridden since I was a child; but I hope to learn."

"Then that mount on Captain Waring's pony was your first attempt! How ridiculous you did look! I'm afraid you are rather too old to learn riding now. Can you dance?"

"Yes; I am very fond of dancing."

"How many ball dresses did you bring out?" demanded Miss Piske.

"Only three," replied the other, apologetically.

"Oh, they will be ample. India is not what it was. Girls sit out half the night. Don't let your aunt choose your frocks for you, my dear; indeed, we will all present you with a vote of thanks if you will choose *hers*. I've such a painful sense of color that a crude combination always hurts me. Just look at that Chuprassi, in bright scarlet, standing against a blazing magenta background—of Bourgainvillia; the contrast is an outrage. I must really ask some one to get the man to move on. Here comes Sir Gloster. We will go and appeal to him together." And she walked off.

"I suppose that is the latest arrival?" said Sir Gloster, a big, heavy-looking young man, who wore loose-fitting clothes, a shabby soft felt hat, and rolled as he walked.

"Yes; that is Miss Gordon, Mrs. Brande's niece. She has half a dozen, and wrote home for one, and they say she asked for the best-looking, and people here, who have nicknames for every one, call her "the sample."

"Excellent!" ejaculated Sir Gloster, "and a first-class sample. She might tell them to furnish a few more on the same pattern."

"I expect we shall find one quite enough for the present," rejoined Miss Piske rather drily.

"Have all the people nicknames?"

"Most of them,—those who are in any way remarkable," she answered, as they paced up and down.

"That red-faced man over there is called 'sherry,' and his wife—I don't see her—'bittera.' Captain Waring, who is abnormally rich, is called the 'millionaire'; his cousin, the fair young man in flannels, who keeps rather in the background, is 'the poor relation.' Miss Clegg is known as 'the dāk-bungalow mourghie,' because she is so bony; and the four Miss Abrahams, who always sit in a row, and are, as you notice, a little dark, are 'the snowy range.'"

"Excellent," ejaculated Sir Gloster.

"That man that you see drinking coffee," pursued the sprightly damsel, "with the great flat mahogany face, is 'the Europe ham,'—is it not a lovely name? Those two Miss Valpya, the girls with the short hair and immense expanse of shirt fronts, are called 'the lads'; that red-headed youth is known as 'the pink'un,' and the two Mrs. Robinsons are respectively 'good Mrs. Robinson' and 'pretty Mrs. Robinson.'"

"Excellent!" repeated the Baronet once more. "And no doubt you and I—at any rate I—have been fitted with a new name, and all that sort of thing?"

"Oh, no," shaking her head. "Besides," with a sweetly flattering smile, "there is nothing to ridicule about you."

She was certainly not going to tell him that he was called "double Gloster" in reference to his size!

Sir Gloster Sandilands was about thirty years of age, rustic in his ideas, simple in his tastes, narrow in his views. He was the only son of his mother, a widow, who kept him in great order. He was fond of ladies' society and of music, and, being rather dull and heavy, greatly appreciated a pretty, lively, and amusing companion. Companions of this description were not unknown to him at home; but as they were generally as

penniless as they were charming, the Dowager Lady Sandilands kept them and their fascinations at an impracticable distance. She trusted to his sister, Mrs. Kane, to look strictly after her treasure whilst under her roof; but Mrs. Kane was a great deal too much occupied with her own affairs to have any time to bestow on her big brother, who surely was old enough to take care of himself! He was enchanted with India, and the change from a small county club and confined local surroundings, the worries of a landlord and magistrate, to this exquisite climate and scenery, and free, novel, roving life, was delightful. He had spent the cold weather in the plains, and had come up to Shirani to visit his sister, as well as to taste the pleasures of an Indian hill station.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Brande had introduced her niece to a number of people, and seeing her carried off by young Jervis to look on at the tennis, had sunk into a low chair and abandoned herself to a discussion with another matron.

From this she was ruthlessly disturbed by Mrs. Langrishe.

"Excuse me, dear, but you are sitting on the 'World.'"

"Oh, no, indeed, I'm sure I am not," protested the lady promptly, being reluctant to leave herself out of her comfortable seat.

"Well, please to look," rather sharply.

"There," impatiently; "you see it is not here. I don't know why you should think that I was sitting on it."

"I suppose," with a disagreeable smile, "I naturally suspected you, because you sit on every one!" And then she moved off, leaving her opponent gasping.

"I never knew such an odious woman," she cried, almost in tears. "She hustles me about and snaps at me, and then she will have the face to write down and

borrow all my plated side-dishes and ice-machine the first time she has a dinner; but that is not *often*, thank goodness."

In the mean while Honor had been leaning over a rustic railing, watching a tennis match in which her uncle was playing. He was an enthusiast, played well, and looked amazingly young and active.

"So you have been making friends, I see," observed Jervis.

"I don't know about friends," she repeated, doubtfully, thinking of Lalla. "But I've been introduced to several people."

"That verandah is an awful place. Waring has extraordinary nerve to sit there among all those strangers. I am much too shy to venture within a mile of it."

"I believe he is quite at home, and has met no end of acquaintances. Have you paid any visits yet?"

"No, only one or two that he dragged me out to. I'm not a society man."

"And how will you put in your time?"

"I'm fond of rackets and tennis. Your uncle has given me a general invitation to his courts. Do you think we could get up a game to-morrow,—your uncle and I, and you, and Miss Paske, or Mrs. Sladen——?"

"Yes, if we could get Mrs. Sladen."

"Not Miss Paske! Don't you like her?" with a twinkle in his eye.

"It is too soon to say whether I like her or not; but she did not think it too soon to make fun of my aunt to me."

"Well, Miss Gordon, I'll tell you something. I don't care about Miss Paske."

"Why?" she asked quickly.

"Because she snubs me so ferociously. It was the same in Calcutta. By the way, how delighted she was just now when you, with an air most childlike and bland,

informed her aunt and most of Shirani of her pleasant little expeditions with young Joy!"

"Ought I not to have said anything?" enquired Honor, turning a pair of tragic eyes upon him. "Oh, that is so like me, always blundering into mistakes. But I never dreamt that I was—was——"

"Letting cats out of bags, eh?" he supplemented quietly.

"No, indeed; and it seemed so odd that she did not remember meeting me, only three days ago."

"You were thoroughly determined that she should not forget it, and—we will see if she ever forgives you. Here comes old Sladen," as a heavy figure loomed in view, crunching down the gravel, and leaning on the railings in a manner that tested them severely. Sladen looked down upon the gay groups and six tennis courts in full swing. He had an idea that blunt rudeness, administered in a fatherly manner, was pleasing to young women of Miss Gordon's age, and he said,—

"So I hear you came up with the great catch of the season,—ha, ha, ha!—and got the start of all the girls in the place, eh?"

"Great catch?" she repeated, with her delicate nose high in the air.

"Well, don't look as if you were going to shoot me! I mean the millionaire,—that fellow Waring. He seems to be rolling in coin now, but I used to know him long ago when he had not a stiver. He used to gamble——"

"This is his cousin, Mr. Jervis," broke in Honor precipitately.

"Oh, indeed," casting an indifferent glance at Jervis. "Well, it's not a bad thing to be a cousin to a millionaire."

"How do you know he is a millionaire?" enquired the young man, coolly.

"Oh, I put it to him, and he did not deny the soft impeachment. He has just paid a top price for a couple

of weight-carrying polo ponies. I expect old Byng stuck it on."

"The fact of buying polo ponies goes for nothing; if that were a test, you might call nearly every subaltern in India a millionaire," rejoined Jervis, with a smile.

Colonel Sladen merely stared at the speaker with an air of solemn contempt, threw the stump of his cheroot into a bush of heliotrope, and turning once more to Honor, said,—

"You see all our smartest young men down there, Miss Gordon,—at your feet in one sense, and they will be there in another before long. I can tell you all about them. It's a good thing for a strange young lady to know how the land lies, and get the straight tip, and know what are trumps."

"What do you mean?" asked Honor, frigidly.

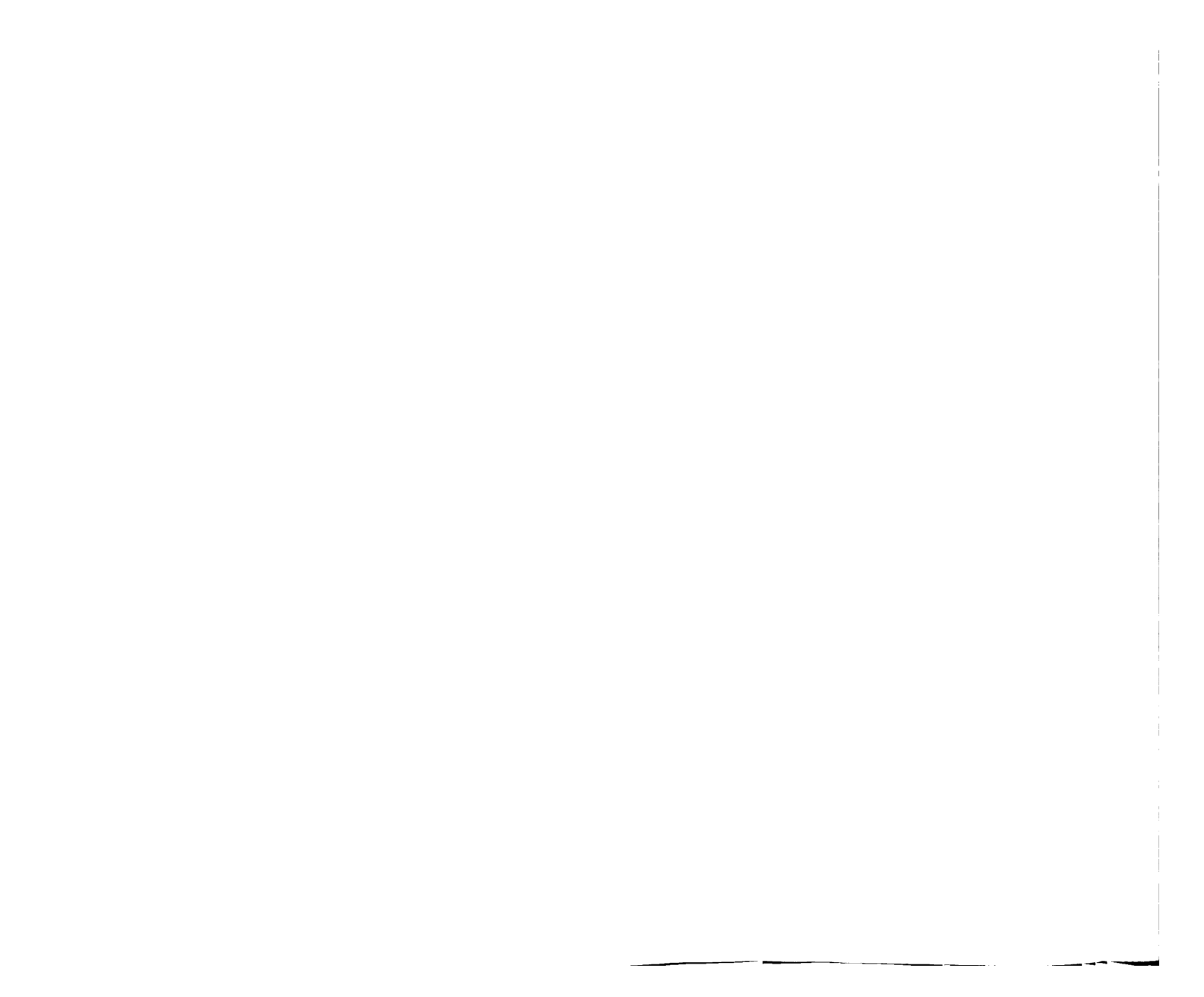
"Oh, come now!" with an odious chuckle. "You know what I mean. I want to point you out some of the people, and as I am the oldest resident you could not be in better hands. There's Captain Billings of the Bays, the fellow with the yellow cap, playing with Miss Clover, the prettiest girl here——"

He paused, to see if the shot told or if the statement would be challenged; but no.

"That is Toby Joy, who acts and dances, and ought to be in a music-hall instead of in the service. There is Jenkins of the Crashers, the thin man with a red belt,—very rich; his father made the money in pigs or pills,—not what you'd call 'hall-marked'; but he is rich. Then there is Alston of the Gray Rifles—good-looking chap, eldest son—and Howard of the Queen's Palfreys; old family, heaps of tin, but he drinks. Now, which of these young men are you going to set your cap at?"

"None of them," she answered, with pale dignity.

"Oh, come! I'll lay you five to one you are married by this time next year."



"No,—not by this time five years."

"Nonsense! Then what did you come out for, my dear young lady? You won't throw dust in the eyes of an old Qui Hye like me, who has seen hundreds of new spines in his day. I suppose you think you have come out to be a comfort to your aunt and uncle. Not a bit of it! You have come out to be a comfort to some young man. Take a friend's advice," lowering his voice to a more confidential key, "and keep your eye steadily on the millionaire!"

"Colonel Sladen," her lips trembling with passion, her eyes blazing with wrath, "I suppose you are joking, and think all this very funny. It does not amuse me in the least. On the contrary, I—I—think it is a pitiable thing to find a man of your age so wanting in good taste and talking such vulgar nonsense."

"Do you, really?" in a bantering tone, and not a whit abashed; in fact, rather pleased than otherwise. "No sense of respect for your elders! Ho, ho, ho! No sense of humour, eh? Well, I believe you are a regular young fire-ship; we shall be having the whole place in a blaze,—a fire-Brande; that's a joke. Eh! not bad! I see Tombs beckoning. He has got up a rubber at last, thank goodness. Sorry to tear myself away. Think over my advice,—*ex recore*." And he departed, chuckling.

"Did you ever know such a detestable man?" she exclaimed, turning to Jervis with tears of anger glittering in her eyes.

"Well, once or twice it *did* occur to me to heave him over the palings,—if I was able."

Honor burst into an involuntary laugh as she thought of their comparative weight.

"He did it on purpose to draw you, and he has riled you properly——"

"To think of his being the husband of such a woman as Mrs. Sladen! Oh, I detest him! Imagine his having

the insolence to make out that every girl who comes to India is nothing but a scheming, mercenary, fortune-hunter! I am glad he pointed out all the rich men!"

"May I ask why?" enquired her startled companion.

"Because, of course, I shall take the greatest possible care never to know one of them!"

"So poverty, for once, will have its innings! You will not taboo the younger sons?"

"No; only good matches and great catches!" with vicious emphasis. "Hateful expressions! Mr. Jervis, I give you fair warning that if you were rich I would never speak to you again! You are laughing!" (He certainly *was* laughing; as he leant his head down on his arms his shoulders shook unmistakably.)

"Perhaps," in an icy tone, "when your amusement has subsided you will be good enough to take me back to my aunt."

"Oh, Miss Gordon!" suddenly straightening himself and confronting her with a pair of suspiciously moist eyes, "I must have seemed extremely rude, and I humbly beg your pardon. I was laughing at—at—my own thoughts, and your wrathful indignation was such that—that——"

"You had better not say any more," she interrupted. "You will only make matters worse. It"—with a dawning smile—"is what I always do myself. I speak from experience."

"Promise me one thing," he urged, "that you will not drop me when you are weeding out your acquaintance."

"Pray why should I drop you? My new rule does not apply to you. Are you a millionaire?" And she broke into a laugh. A keener observer than the young lady would have noticed a shade of embarrassment in his glance as, after a moment's hesitation, he said,—

"I am quite an old Indian friend now, at any rate,—almost your first acquaintance."

"Yes, I admit all that; but you must not presume on our ancient friendship. I warn you solemnly that the next time you laugh at me—laugh, until you actually cry—our relations will be strained."

* * * * *

It was becoming dark; the fires were visibly increasing on the distant hills, the first mess-bugle had gone. There was a general getting into rickshaws and calling for ponies, and presently the club was empty, the formidable verandahs deserted, and all the red-capped little tennis boys went trooping home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TABLE OF PRECEDENCE.

TIME wore on, Honor was becoming familiarised with her new surroundings, had picked up some useful Hindustani words, made a round of calls, and shown that she had no mean skill at tennis; and Mrs. Brande had demonstrated that she was not a woman of words only; she had given young Jervis a general and urgent invitation to her house; moreover, he found favour in her husband's eyes. He was a fine, well set up, gentlemanly young fellow, a keen tennis-player, with no haw haw humbug about him. Therefore the honourable Pelham heartily endorsed his wife's hospitality.

As for Captain Waring, alas, the three days' travelling intimacy—like steamer friendships—had flickered and flickered and sunk down and died. Mrs. Brande's state dinners were unimpeachable but desperately dull, and she was not in the "smart" set. Her niece was far too

downright and raw; her sincere grey eyes had a way of looking at him that made him feel uncomfortable; yes, a *blasé*, world-battered, selfish mortal. She had a sharp tongue, too, and no fortune, therefore he went over to the enemy's camp and followed the standard of Mrs. Langrishe.

* * * * *

The first grand entertainment at which Honor had appeared was a large, solemn dinner-party given by the chief medical officer in Shirani. There were to be thirty guests. This much Mrs. Brande's cook had gleaned from Mrs. Lloyd's Khansamah when he came to borrow jelly-tins and ice-spoons. Mrs. Brande delighted in these formal dinners, where she could enjoy herself most thoroughly as chief guest and experienced critic, and looked forward to this feast with what seemed to her niece an almost infantile degree of glee and happy anticipation.

Mr. Brande was absent, but even had he been at home he was never enthusiastic respecting these functions; his wife had complained to Mrs. Sladen, "that he got into his evening clothes and bad humour at one and the same time," save when he dined at home.

"You will wear your white silk, Honor," observed her aunt, "and I my new pink brocade with the white lace. I'm really curious to see what sort of a turn-out Mrs. Lloyd will have; she had the Black's old cook, and they never gave a decent dinner, but then Mrs. Black was stingy, she grudged a glass of wine for sauce, and never allowed more than half an anna a head for soup-meat. Now Mrs. Lloyd is getting up fish from Bombay, so I fancy she means to do the thing properly. Have you ever been to a dinner-party, child?"

"No. Not what you would call a party,—six at the most,—but I have come in after dinner."

"Fie, fie! that is poor fun," cried Mrs. Brande, with

great scorn. "I should just like to see any one asking my niece to come after dinner. I wonder who will take you in? I know most of the people who are going, for I always read their names in the Peon's Book when I get invitations. There will be Captain Waring, and young Jervis, and Sir Gloster Sandilands. I hope Captain Waring will take you in."

"Oh, I hope not, aunt; he and I do not suit one another at all."

"Why not?" rather sharply.

"I've not sufficient 'go' in me. I can't talk about the people he knows. I'm not smart or up to date. I can't say amusing things like Miss Paske; I am merely a stupid, little country mouse!"

"Nonsense! Well, I must say I'd fifty times rather have Jervis myself. He has such nice manners, different to other young men who come to my house and eat and drink of the best and scarcely look at me afterwards. There was that Thorpe, he never even got off his chair when I spoke to him at the club. I know I'm not a lady born, my father was a wheelwright, but he and his had been in the same place three hundred years; but I have my feelings, and that Thorpe, though he may be a lord's son, is no gentleman. He thought I was deaf, and I heard him say to a man when I was on his arm,—

"'I'm going to supper the old girl.'"

"'Not *this* old girl, thank you, sir,' said I, and I drow back and went and sat down again. 'Ow he does 'ate me, to be sure! Well, Honor, I wish you a pleasant partner, for these dinners are long affairs.'"

"Arraghey indeed, aunt? I am sorry to hear it."

"If they bring the *entrées* in after the joint, which is new-fashioned and leading to mistakes, we are stuck for two mortal hours. These native servants are the ten plagues of Egypt. Once—oh, lor, I shall never forget the lady's face,—I saw a man handing round mashed

potatoes as an *entrée*, all alone. Once I saw a wretch offering mustard in a breakfast cup and the mistress having splendid silver cruet-stands. Of course he had some spite against her; it's on *these* occasions they pay you out when they know you are tied hand and foot. As for myself, I am all right; being senior lady, the doctor takes me. Mrs. Langrishe for once will be nowhere, for the Lloyds (she being a commissioner's daughter) know what's what. They have the rules of precedence at their fingers' ends. But any way I can always lend them this." And she took up a book bound in blue paper and began to read aloud,—

"'All wives take place according to the rank assigned to their respective husbands.' Do they, indeed?" she snorted. "I'd like to know how many times Mrs. Langrishe has walked through *that* rule? Now, my husband being a member of Council comes next to a bishop. Do you see, Honor?"

"Yea, Aunt Sara."

"Whilst Mrs. Langrishe ranks below political agents of twelve years' standing. And I'm not at *all* sure that she ought to go in before the educational department second class."

"No, aunt," replied Honor, endeavouring to look wise, and marvelling much at Mrs. Brande's enthusiasm. Her color had risen, her eyes shone, as she energetically brandished the pamphlet in her hand.

The great day arrived at last. People in Shirani did not give long invitations, and Mrs. Brande in her new pink brocade, wearing all her diamonds and a cap with three lofty pink plumes, departed in good time along with her niece, who wore her new white silk and brought her violin by special request.

Mrs. Lloyd received them with effusion, the room was half full of the *élite* of Shirani wearing their best clothes and their blindest official manners. Honor noticed

Major and Mrs. Langrishe, Sir Gloster Sandilands, Captain Waring, Mr. Jervis, Captain Noble, the padre and his wife, the cantonment magistrate and his wife, the colonel commanding the Scupidia, and many others. It was a most solemn official party. Presently the dining-room door was flung wide, and a magnificent servant salaamed and said,—

"Khana-mex pur,"—*i.e.*, "dinner is served."

Mrs. Brande half rose from her seat and smiled encouragingly at her host.

But, what was this? He was offering his arm to an insignificant little person in black who was barely thirty years of age and a complete stranger. Mrs. Brande, as she subsequently expressed it, "turned gooseflesh all over."

What an affront before the whole station, or at least the best part of it! and there was Mrs. Langrishe looking at her with, oh, such an *odious* smile! Well, at any rate, she would not give her the satisfaction of seeing her break down or fly out. That smile was a stimulant. And rising after some moments' distinctly perceptible hesitation, during which the spectators almost held their breath, she accepted the escort of the gentleman who had humbly bowed himself before her, and with a dangerous-looking toss of her plumes surged slowly into the dining-room.

She was conducted to a conspicuous place, but what of that? nothing, no, not even a gilded chair with a coronet on the back, would now appease or please her. Declining soup with a haughty gesture, she leant back and gazed about her scornfully. Yea, there was a distinct smell of kerosene oil; one of the Khitmatghars wore a dirty coat; that was Mrs. Sladen's claret-jug, and most of the forks were borrowed. As for the dinner, she sent away dish after dish with ill-concealed contempt, slightly varying the monotony of this proceed-

ing by leaving conspicuous helpings untasted on her plate, knowing well that such behaviour is pain and grief to a hostess. Even the host noticed her scanty appetite and remarked in his loud, cheery voice,—

"Why, Mrs. Brande, you are eating nothing."

"Indeed," she leant forward and called out, "I'm so far from you, I wonder you can notice it;" adding to this extremely ungracious reply, "I've no appetite *this* evening." And she flung herself once more back in her chair and waved her fan to and fro furiously.

There to aggravate her still further was that Lalla Paske opposite, sitting between Sir Gloster and Captain Waring and ogling and carrying on. Little reptile! she would like to throw a plate at her. Honor was on Sir Gloster's other hand, looking, as her aunt mentally noted, very "distangay" and animated. The Baronet seemed to be greatly struck and talked away incessantly, and this was the one miserable crumb of comfort on which the poor lady dined.

Honor was not too engrossed with her own affairs not to notice that her aunt appeared most dreadfully put out about something and was lookingly exceedingly flushed and angry.

Indeed, Miss Paske, good-natured, kind little soul, leant over and said to her, "Have you noticed Mrs. Brande? Does she not look extraordinary? Her face is so red and swelled up, I really believe she is going to have a fit of some sort. She is neither eating nor speaking."

However, during dessert Mrs. Brande found her tongue. There was a general discussion on the subject of Christian names, and some one said that "Honor was a nice old-fashioned one."

"Oh," cried Lalla, "I think it hideous! You don't mind, do you, Miss Gordon? How angry I should have been if my godfathers and godmothers had given it to



me! It has such an abrupt sound and is so very goody-goody."

Mrs. Brande, who had hitherto refused to talk to her neighbour even in the most ordinary way to discuss the weather, the great diamond case, or the state of the rupee, now suddenly burst out,—

"Anyway, it has a decent meaning, and if it is goody-goody, yours is not. I believe there was once a Miss Rooke who had the same name, and was fond of play-acting and singing, and by all accounts *no* great shakes."

In just alarm, Mrs. Lloyd made a hasty signal, and the ladies arose as if worked by one spring,—departed into the drawing-room in a body. Mrs. Brande immediately seated herself in a large arm-chair, where she sat aloof and alone, looking stern and unapproachable as she slowly turned over an album of photographs. The book was upside down, but this was evidently immaterial.

Vainly did Mrs. Lloyd come and stand before her and abase herself, vainly did she endeavour to propitiate her. Poor deluded little woman, it was mere waste of time and breath to praise Mrs. Brande's dress, Mrs. Brande's niece, or even to beg for a recipe for chutney.

"I can give you a recipe for *manners*," observed the outraged matron in an awful tone; "I will send you the Table of Precedence, and I will *write* to you to-morrow."

On hearing this terrible threat Mrs. Lloyd's blood ran cold, for she was a woman of peace, and at this juncture the men appeared slouching in by twos and threes as is their wont. They discovered the ladies scattered in couples about the room, all save one, who sat in solitary majesty.

Captain Waring sauntered over to Lalla and remarked, as he glanced significantly at Mrs. Brande, who sat motionless as a cloud on a hot summer's day,—a cloud charged with electricity,—“When I look round I am inclined to say with the kind-hearted child when he was

shown Doré's picture, 'There is one poor lion who has got no Christian!'"

"She is by no means so badly off as you imagine," rejoined Lalla, with a demure face. "She has nearly eaten the hostess. Does she not look furious? Who shall we throw to her for a fresh victim? She is frightfully angry because she was not taken into dinner first. Poor creature, she has so very little dignity that she is always taking the greatest care of it. Hurrah! Hurrah! She is actually going. Oh, I am enormously amused!"

Yes, Mrs. Brande had already risen to depart. If not taken in first, she was firmly resolved to take this matter into her own hands, and to be the first to leave.

It was in vain that meek Mrs. Lloyd pleaded that it was only half-past nine; that every one was looking forward to hearing Miss Gordon play; that she had promised to bring her violin.

"Surely, Mrs. Brande, you will not be so cruel as to take her away and disappoint the whole company," urged Mrs. Lloyd, pathetically. "I am told that her violin-playing is marvellous."

"The company have seen Miss Gordon's aunt playing *second fiddle* all the evening, and *that* must content them for the present," retorted Mrs. Brande, who was already in the verandah robed in a superb long cloak, the very fur of which seemed to catch something of its owner's spirit, and to bristle up about her ears as, with a sweeping inclination, and beckoning to Honor to follow her, she swept down the steps.

All the way home, and as they rolled along side by side, Mrs. Brande gave vent to her wrath, and allowed her injured feelings fair play. "Precedence" was her hobby, her one strong point. A woman might rob her, slander her, even strike her, sooner than walk out of a room before her. She assured her awe-struck niece that she would write to "P." before she slept that night, and

unless she received an ample apology the matter should go up to the Viceroy! What was the use of people getting up in the service, and earning rewards by years of hard work, in bad climates and deadly jungles, if any one who liked might kick them down the ladder, as she had been kicked that evening?

"What!" she angrily continued, with voice pitched half an octave higher, "was the value of these appointments; or was it child's play and a new game? It would be a dear game to some people!"

She arrived at this conclusion and her own door simultaneously, and flinging off her wrap and snatching a lamp from a terrified Khitmatghar (who saw that the Mem Sahib was "Bahout Kuffa"), she hurried into her husband's sanctum and returned with a book.

"What was that person's name, Honor?" she enquired? "Did you happen to hear it? The woman who was taken in first?"

"Mrs. Ringrose, I believe."

"Ringrose, Ringrose," hunting through the leaves with feverish haste. "Ye-es, here it is."

"James—Walter—Ringrose. He is a member of Council in Calcutta, and just one week senior to P." and she gazed at her niece with a face almost devoid of colour, and the expression of a naughty child who is desperately ashamed of herself. "So I've been in a tantrum, and missed my dinner and a pleasant evening, all for nothing! Well, to be sure, I've been a fine old fool," throwing the book on the table. "But what brings Calcutta people up here?" she demanded, pettishly.

"I think she is sister to some one in Shirani, and her husband has gone on to the snows, and left her here. Dear Aunt Sara," continued Honor, playfully, "why do you trouble your head about precedence? How can it matter how you go in to a meal or where you sit?"

"My dear child, it's in my very blood. I can't help

it; it is meat and drink to me,—it is what a lover is to a girl, a coronet to a duchess, a medal to a soldier; it's the outward and visible sign of P.'s deserts—and mine. And the sight of another woman sitting in my lawful place just chokes me. 'A woman takes rank according to her husband,'—that seemed to be ringing in my ears all the evening. How was I to know her husband was in Council, too? However, I went in to dinner; that's one comfort." (It had not been much comfort to her cavalier.) "At first I was in two minds to go straight home. I remember hearing of three ladies at a party who each expected to go in with the host; and when he took one, the others got up and walked off supperless."

"I think they were extremely foolish. They ought to have taken each other in arm-in-arm,—it's what I should have done," said Honor, emphatically.

"Yes, young people don't care; but I can no more change than a leopard his skin and a nigger his spots. Well, you know what I mean. I am not always such a stickler, though; for instance, this very winter, when I happened to go into the Ladies' Club at Alijore, and no one stood up to receive me, I took no notice, though I was so hurt I scarcely closed an eye that night. Kiss me, dearie, and forgive me, as one of the party for breaking up so early and spoiling every one's pleasure" (a supreme flight of imagination). "Maybe some day you will be touchy, too."

"Perhaps I may; but not about rank and precedence. Surely there is no precedence in heaven."

"I'm not so certain of that," rejoined Mrs. Brande. "An archangel is above an angel. However, I may leave my proud thoughts behind, for I'll have a lowly place,—if I ever get there at all. Now, dear, I'm just starving; a morsel of flesh and a spoonful of aspic was all I had. So call Bahadar Ali to get me some cold turkey and ham and a glass of claret. Maybe you would take a pick, too?"

"No indeed, thank you. I had a capital dinner."

"And you found your partner pleasant,—a rising young civilian. I nursed him through typhoid, and I know him well. He draws twelve hundred a month. If you married him you would take the *pas* of Mrs. Langrishe."

"Dear auntie," bursting out into a peal of laughter, "how funny you are! I am not going to marry any one. You must deliver me at home a single young woman."

"What nonsense! However," as if struck by a happy thought, "you might be engaged, and still single. I saw you talking to Sir Gloster——"

"Yes, he is very pleasant. He was telling me about his tour among the old cities of the Deccan."

"Yes; and I noticed Miss Lalla trying to put in her spoon. What a pushing little monkey she is! Her aunt's very double."

* * * * *

To show her penitence, instead of the letter she had threatened,—and which lay like a nightmare on poor Mrs. Lloyd,—Mrs. Brande sent restitution the next day in the form of a dozen pineapples and a basket of fresh eggs. They were gladly accepted as peace-offerings, and Mrs. Lloyd heard no more about "The Table of Precedence."

CHAPTER XIX.

"LET US TELL THE TRUTH."

A MONTH had elapsed, and Shirani was as full and as gay as Miss Paske had predicted. There were dinners, dances, balls, theatricals, and picnics.

Visitors had shaken down into sets, and discovered who they liked and who they did not like. In a short hill

season there is no time to waste on long drawn-out overtures and acquaintance. Besides, in India, society changes so rapidly and has so many mutual friends,—the result of so many different moves,—that people know each other as intimately in six months as they would in six years in England. There were "sets" in Shirani, though not aggressively defined. The acting and musical set, which numbered as stars Miss Paske and Mr. Joy; also Captain Dashwood of the Dappled Hussars, Mrs. Rolland, who had once been a matchless actress, but was now both deaf and quarrelsome, and many other lesser lights.

Then there was the "smart" set, headed by Mrs. Langrishe, who wore dresses more suitable to Ascot than the Himalayas; drank tea with each other, dined with each other, talked Peerage, and discussed London gossip; looked down on many of their neighbours, and spoke of them as being "scarcely human," and were altogether quite painfully exclusive.

There was the "fast" set,—men who played high at the club, betted on races in England (per wire), enjoyed big nights and bear-fights, and occasionally went down without settling their club account!

And even Mrs. Brande had a set,—yes, positively, her own little circle, for the first time in her life, and was a proud and happy woman.

"It made a wonderful difference having a girl in the house," she remarked at least twice a day to "P.," and "P.," strange to say, received the well-worn observation without a sarcastic rejoinder. Certainly, Honor had made a change at Rookwood. She had prevailed on her aunt to allow her to cover the green rep drawing-room suite with pretty cretonne, to banish the round table with its circle of books dealt out like a pack of cards, to arrange flowers and grasses in profusion, and to have tea in the verandah. Honor played tennis capitally, and her

uncle, instead of going to the club, inaugurated sets at home, and these afternoons began to have quite a reputation! There were good courts, good players, excellent refreshments. Mrs. Brande's strawberries and rich yellow cream were renowned, and people were eager for standing invitations to Rookwood "Tuesdays" and "Saturdays." Besides Mr. Brande and his niece,—hosts in themselves,—there were Sir Gloster, Mrs. Sladen, the padre and his wife, and young Jervis, who were regular *habités*. There were tournaments and prizes, and a briskness and "go" about these functions that made them the most popular entertainments in Shirani, and folk condescended to fish industriously for what they would once have scorned,—viz., "invitations to Mother Brande's afternoons."

Captain Waring was tired of Shirani, though he had met many old pals, played polo three times a week and whist six times until the small hours. Although invited out twice as much as any other bachelor, and twice as popular as his cousin, he and his cousin, as he remarked with a roar of laughter, "Were not in the same set!"

Nor for that matter were Mrs. Langrishe and her niece in the same set, for Lalla was "theatrical" and her aunt was "smart."

Captain Waring and his companion lived together in Haddon Hall, with its world-wide reputation for smoking chimneys; but although they resided under the same roof they saw but little of one another. Waring had the best rooms, an imposing staff of crest-embazoned servants. Jervis lived in two small apartments, and the chief of his retinue was a respectable grey-bearded bearer, Jan Mahomed by name, who looked *cheap*. Jervis spent most of his time taking long walks or rides, shooting or sketching with some young fellows in the Scorpions, or up at Rookwood, where he dined at least thrice a week and spent all his Sundays, and where he

had been warmly received by Ben, and adopted into the family as his "uncle!" No words, however many and eloquent, could more strongly indicate how highly he stood in Mr. and Mrs. Brande's good graces! To be Ben's "uncle" almost implied that they looked upon him as an adopted son!

Frequently days elapsed, and Clarence and his companion scarcely saw one another save at polo. Mark kept early hours, and was up betimes; indeed, occasionally he was up and dressed ere his cousin had gone to bed.

One afternoon, however, he found him evidently awaiting his arrival,—sitting in the verandah, and not, as usual, at the club card-table.

"Hullo, Mark! what a gay young bird you are!—always going out, always on the wing,—never at home!"

"The same to you," said the other, cheerily.

"Well, I just wanted to see you, and catch you for a few minutes, old chap. I'm getting beastly sick of this place. We have been here nearly six weeks. I vote, as the policeman says, we 'move on.'"

"Move where?" was the laconic enquiry.

"To Simla, to be sure! The club here is just a mere rowdy pot-house. I never saw such rotten polo! My best pony is lame,—gone in the shoulder. I believe that little beggar, Byng, stuck me; and besides this, Miss Potter, the girl with the black eyes and twelve hundred a year, is going away——"

"To Simla?" expressively.

"Yea. She does not want to move; but the people she is with, the Athertons, are off, and of course she is bound to go with them. That girl likes me,—she believes in me."

"Do you think she believes that you are what they call you here, a millionaire?"

"What a grossly coarse way of putting it! Well, I should not be surprised if she did."

"Then if that is the case, don't you think the sooner you undeceive her the better?"

"Excellent high-minded youth! But why?"

"Because it strikes me that we have played this little game long enough."

"And you languish for the good old board ship and Poonah days over again! Shall we publish who is really who in the papers, and send a little 'para' to the *Pioneer*?" with angry sarcasm.

"No; but don't you see that when I took what you called a 'back seat,' I never supposed it would develop into a regular sort of society fraud, or lead us on to such an extent. I'm always on the point of blurting out something about money, and pulling myself up. If I speak the truth, people will swear I am lying. I don't mind their thinking me an insignificant, idle young ass; but when they talk before me of dire poverty, and then pause apologetically,—when they positively refrain from asking me to subscribe to entertainments or charities, I tell you I don't like it. I am a rank impostor. There will be an awful explosion some day if we don't look out."

"A pleasant explosion for you. Surely you are not quite such a fool as to suppose that any one would think the worse of you because you are a rich man."

Mark's thoughts wandered to Honor Gordon, and he made no answer.

"We have gone too far to go back," continued Waring, impressively,—"*at least as far as Shirani is concerned. We might shift our sky and go to Simla, and then after a time allow the truth to come out.*"

"I am desperately sorry I ever tampered with the truth," cried the other, starting to his feet and beginning to walk about the verandah. "I have never told a direct

lie, and no one has ever suspected me. I have not a rich air, nor the tastes of a wealthy man. Now, you," suddenly halting before Clarence and looking him all over, "have both!"

"True, O king! and people jumped at their own conclusions. Can we help that? It has given me a ripping good time, and saved you a lot of bother and annoyance. Why, the girl in the plaid waistcoat would have married you months ago."

"Not she! I'm not so easily married as all that!" rejoined the other, indignantly.

"I am much relieved to hear it. I am glad you remember Uncle Dan's instructions. I was afraid they were beginning to slip out of your head; and bearing them in mind, I think the sooner—for *all parties*—that you clear out of Shirani the better."

"I am not going to budge," said Jervis, resolutely; "and you know the reason——"

Waring blew away a mouthful of smoke, and then drawled out, "Of course,—Miss Gordon——"

"No, my father," reddening like a girl. "You know he lives within forty miles of this, and that was what made me so keen to come to Shirani."

"Yes, I understand perfectly; and so keen to *stay*!"

"I wrote to him," ignoring this innuendo, "and said I would wait on here till October, hoping to see him."

"You'll never see him," now bringing a volume of smoke down his nostrils.

"Time will tell; I hope I shall——"

"And time stands still for no man! The Athertons and Miss Potter start in ten days, and I shall accompany them. There is nothing like travelling with a young lady for advancing one's interests! as you know, my boy. Now, now, don't be angry. Yes, I'm off. I'm not heir to a millionaire, and I must consult my interests. If you will take my advice, you will join the little party."

"No, thank you; I shall stay here."

"Do you mean to say that you will stick to this dead-and-alive place for the next four months?"

"I do,—at any rate till my father sends for me," and he paused for a second,—“or until the end of the season.”

"Or, in fact, in plain English, *until the Brandes go down*," repeated Clarence, significantly; and rising, and tossing away the end of his cigarette, he strolled over to the adjacent mesa.

CHAPTER XX.

MISS PASKE DEFIES HER AUNT.

Mrs. LANGRISHE gave an exceedingly languid acquiescence to the constant remark, "What a charming girl Miss Gordon is, and what a favourite she has become! Her aunt and uncle are quite devoted to her." She was thinking sadly on these occasions of her own niece, Lalla, who danced like a fairy, or moonbeams on the sea, who was always surrounded at balls, whose banjo-playing and smart sayings made her indispensable. No entertainment was considered complete without Miss Paske.

These social triumphs were delightful; but, alas! the fair Lalla was "*Jolie de rue, douleur de maison*," and her aunt, who smiled so complacently in public when congratulated on her young relative's social successes, knew in her heart that that same relative had proved a delusion and a cruel fraud. Fanny had been much cleverer than she supposed in passing on a veritable infliction,—a very base little counterfeit coin! It was true that Fanny had not actually lied in her description. Lalla was good-looking, piquante, accomplished, and even-tempered; but an uneven temper would have been far easier to cope with. When remonstrated with or spoken to sharply,

MISS PASKE DEFIES HER AUNT.

the young lady merely smiled. When desired not to do such and such a thing, she did it—and smiled. When her aunt, on rare occasions, lost her temper with her, she positively beamed! She never attempted to argue, but simply went on her way, as steadily obdurate as a whole train of commissariat mules.

She was distinctly forbidden to go to Sunday picnics, but went to them nevertheless. She was requested not to sit in "Kala Juggas" (dark corners) at balls. Mrs. Langrishe might have saved her breath, for at balls, if she happened by chance to glance into one, she was almost certain to see some young man in company with her incorrigible niece, who would nod at her with a radiant expression, and laughingly refuse to go home.

Poor Mrs. Langrishe! She could not make a scene. Lalla, crafty Lalla, was well aware that her aunt would patiently submit to any private indignity sooner than the world would suspect that her niece was wholly out of hand, and that she could not manage her. Miss Paske traded on this knowledge until she nearly drove her stately chaperon crazy.

The young lady was determined to be amused and to make the best of life, and possibly to marry well. She treated herself in her aunt's house as an honoured and distinguished guest, ordered the servants about, upset existing arrangements, and asked men constantly to lunch or tea, or, oh, climax, dinner! If remonstrated with, she merely remarked, with her most bewitching smile,—

"Oh, but, darling,"—she always called Mrs. Langrishe "darling," even at the most critical moment,—“I always did it at Aunt Fanny's; she never objected, she was so hospitable.”

She gave no assistance in the house, and usually sat in her own room curling her fringe, studying her parts, or writing letters. Her chief intimate was Mrs. Dashwood—who had been on the stage—and the men of the



theatrical set, and she blandly informed her horrified chaperon that she had been considered the fastest girl in India and gloried in the distinction. "In Calcutta they called me 'the sky-scraper,'" she added, with a complacent laugh.

What was to be done? This was a question Mrs. Langrishe put to Granby and then to herself. Never, never had she spent such a miserable time as during these last two months. To be flouted, mocked, and ordered about under her own roof; to be defied, carressed, and called endearing names by a penniless, detestable minx, who was dependent on her even for money for postage-stamps and offertory. Should she pay her passage and pack her off home? No; she would not confess herself beaten, she, the clever woman of the family! She would marry the little wretch, well, in a manner that would redound to her own credit, and then wash her hands of her forever.

* * * * *

The first series of theatricals was an immense success. Miss Paske was the principal lady in the piece and looked charming from across the footlights. Captain Waring, who was fond of the stage, had gone behind the scenes and painted Lalla's pert little face at her own request, which same civility occasioned considerable heart-burning and jealousy among the other ladies, especially as the result was a complete artistic triumph.

Every one was carried away by the young lady's vivacious acting and sprightly dancing, which was both dashing and graceful; in short, the very poetry of motion. Her dress, too,—what there was of it,—was perfect in every detail. Skirt-dancing was as yet in its infancy, a lady figurante was a rare spectacle on an Indian stage, and the novel and astonishing character of the performance swept the spectators off their feet, and Lalla and Toby Joy shared the honours of the night between them.

Mrs. Langrishe was secretly horrified. She had only seen Lalla's costume in the piece; Lalla and the Dirzee (whom she entirely monopolised) had composed it together; she had planned, he had carried out her sketch. There had been mysterious conferences and tryings on, from which her aunt had been rigidly excluded, and Mrs. Langrishe was much too proud to affect an interest or curiosity in the matter, but in her wildest moments she had never dreamt of the character of the dress or its limits.

As she sat in the front row gazing at the waving arms and supple limbs of her odious niece, little did her neighbours guess that a social martyr was among them,—a martyr whose sufferings were still further aggravated by the self-satisfied smirk and airy kiss the fair dancer had deigned to fling her.

Afterwards, when Lalla, closely cloaked and hooded, was modestly receiving the congratulations of her friends, she remarked to them bashfully,—

"Oh, you have no idea how nervous I was at first! My poor little knees were actually shaking under me."

"Were they? I did not notice them," rejoined Mrs. Brande in her severest manner, and listeners allowed that on this occasion "old Mother Brande had scored."

Mrs. Langrishe the next morning, having first fortified herself with a glass of wine, entered her niece's bower in order to administer a really sound scolding, the gist of which was (as repeated by the listening Ayah to other deeply-interested domestics as she took a pull at the cook's hukka),—

"As long as you are in my house and under my care you must behave yourself properly. If this is impossible, as I fear it is, I shall send you straight home. The Ayah will take you to Bombay and see you off second class; the class that best suits your manners is really the steerage. Your acting, and to a certain extent your

dancing, was all very well, but I do not wonder that Mrs. Brande was shocked at your dress, or rather the want of it,—scarcely below your knees!"

"Mrs. Brande is a narrow-minded old toad!" cried Lalla, contemptuously. "I don't believe she was ever in an English theatre in her life. She should see some of the dresses at home!"

"This is not the way to get yourself settled, and you know it," pursued her aunt. "It was most fortunate that Sir Gloster was not present; he is a man with very correct ideas."

"That stupid, sluggish bumpkin! What are his ideas to me?" scoffed Lalla, with a maddening smile.

"I wish he had an idea of you," retorted her aunt. "I'm sure I should be most thankful. However, you are aware that we go down in four months, and remember that this is your last chance!"

Hereupon, according to the Ayah, Miss Sahib "plenty laugh."

But Miss Sahib evidently laid the advice to heart. For a few days she was extremely piano and demure, accepting her recently won honours and the appellation of "Miss Taglioni" with an air of meek protest that was simply delightful.

The play was soon succeeded by a concert at the club, and here Miss Gordon with her violin put Miss Paske completely in the shade for once. What a contrast they presented! the little smirking, bowing, grimacing figure in pink, with clouds of fluffy hair and banjo streaming with gay ribbons, who made up for lack of voice by expression, *etc.*, and impudence, and threw Tommy Atkins in the four arena seats into a delirium of enthusiasm.

Then came the tall young lady in white, with statuesque arms, who gradually cast a spell of enchantment over her listeners and held the emotions of her audience in the hollow of the small hand that guided her bow.

For once Mrs. Brande felt conscious that Honor had quite, as she mentally expressed it, "snuffed out that brazen little monkey;" and though personally she preferred the banjo and nigger melodies, the audience in the two-rupee places apparently did *not*, for they applauded enthusiastically, and stamped and shouted "encore! encore!" and seemed ready to tear the house down. And even young Jervis, usually so retiring and undemonstrative, had clapped until he had split his gloves.

Mrs. Langrishe was not behindhand with her plaudits. She would not leave it in any one's power to declare that she was jealous of Miss Gordon's overwhelming success, but to herself she said,—

"Oh, if Honor Gordon was but *her* niece! How thankfully would she exchange relations with Mrs. Brande! Here was a simple, well-bred girl, who could shine anywhere, and was quite thrown away in her present hands. It was true that Sir Gloster seemed much struck, every one saw *that* except the girl herself and her old bat of an aunt. He had never taken his eyes off her as she stood before the footlights, and she had made an undeniably charming picture, slim and graceful, with an old-fashioned air of maidenly dignity, and *how* she played!"

She glanced at her own special young lady now coming forward to sing yet another ditty amidst the uproarious encouragement of the back benches.

Lalla was pretty, her fair soft hair was wiped up anyhow (a studied art), her eyes were bright, her air piquante, but her expression was everything, and oh, what a little demon she was!

And then she sang; certainly she was the most successful cantatrice who ever sang without a voice.

"What a charming inmate your niece must be, Mrs. Langrishe!" observed a lady next her. "So amusing and bright; quite a sunbeam in the house."

To which the poor martyr rejoined with a somewhat rigid smile, "Oh, yes, indeed, quite delightful."

She envied Mrs. Brande her treasure still more when, as they were leaving the club, she noticed Honor affectionately wrapping up her aunt—for it had turned out a wet night—and making some playful joke as she tied a hood under her ample chin. Her niece had helped herself to the only mackintosh, and had rolled away in her rickshaw among the first flight with a young man riding beside her.

"She went off with Toby Joy! I really am astonished that Mrs. Langrishe allows her to be so independent," said a voice (a woman's) in the dark close beside that ill-used lady, and happily unaware of her vicinity.

Miserable Mrs. Langrishe, if they only knew all the most stony-hearted would surely commiserate her.

She returned home alone, firmly resolved to give Lalla a talking to; but when she arrived her anger had ebbed. She discovered the culprit reclining in an easy-chair, smoking a friendly cigarette with Granby and entertaining him with inimitable mimicry of some of her fellow-performers.

"Oh, so you have appeared at last!" cried Lalla, with languid surprise. "Fie, fie, how late you are, darling! I've been home ages. I took the waterproof to cover up my beloved banjo; I 'wrapped it up in its tarpaulin jacket,' you know the song. I was sure, as I did not see you, that some horrible bore had got hold of you, and I knew you would *hate* to keep me waiting in the rain, so I dashed off home at once."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GREAT STARVATION PICNIC.

THE "picnic" season at Shirani set in with unexampled severity. There were tea picnics, an inexpensive form of entertainment, dear to the economically disposed, who flattered themselves that they could wipe out all social debts by a table-cloth spread on a mossy slope (within an easy ride from cantonment), and to this they bid their friends in order to partake of cheap fruit, bazaar-made cake, and smoked tea,—the selected "view" supplying every deficiency. There were snug little select tea-parties, where the viands were dainty and luxurious and to match the company; appetising luncheons, carried off to be discussed miles away under pine-trees, and facing indistinct blue valleys and brilliantly white peaks; and of all these expeditions, the "Noah's Ark" picnic was indisputably the most popular.

In June, the climate, society, scenery of Shirani, all pointed to picnics, with again picnics, and more picnics. They were unceremonious, easily enjoyed, easily declined. New-comers from below, after a morning among dim cool pine woods, or a critical study of a deep valley, clothed with gorgeous forest-trees, blazing with red, pink, and white rhododendrons, found it difficult to believe that there was such a place far beneath them as tawny-coloured hard-baked plains, over which, instead of a delicate, fragrant breeze, roared the brassen-mouthed blast of the fire-eating hot winds. The *al fresco* season culminated in a "married ladies" picnic,—chiefly got up by Mrs. Langrishe and Mrs. Brande. There had been a committee meeting at the ladies' room at the club; Mrs.

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Langrishe was voted secretary, being very capable with her pen. The meeting had been held with closed doors, solemn and secret.

All the same, some of the motions and arrangements had leaked out. It was known that Mrs. Brande had volunteered to provide the champagne; also fowls, hams, and raised pies. Mrs. Sladen was down for afternoon tea, cups and saucers, milk, sugar, and cake. Mrs. Dashwood provided cheroots, cigarettes, and pegs. Mrs. Lloyd the sweets, tarts, jellies, and meringues. Mrs. Clark the soup. Mrs. Glover the ices.

The thing was to be done in style.

Mrs. Paul (the padre's wife, and having a large family) was let off with coffee.

"Your own cups and spoons, of course," added the secretary, imperatively.

Mrs. Langrishe,—there was a long-drawn breath of expectancy as she read out her own name,—“Well, she would provide the appointments: table-cloths and napkins, plates, knives and forks, bread, salad, and water.” There was a pause, and she continued, impressively,—

“It was not every one who would care to risk their nice things” (she would borrow from Manockjee, the Parsee shop), “but she would venture;” and her meek coadjutors accepted her contribution just as gratefully as Mrs. Brande's champagne and ham. It was one of her usual master-strokes, and the picnic would cost her nothing beyond the use of some table-cloths and a few loaves of bread.

All the station were to be invited; the place selected was five miles from Shirani; the guests were to assemble at Mrs. Langrishe's house. With her usual ability, she took the entire honours upon herself, and got the whole credit of the entertainment in anticipation. Of course it was to be a Noah's Ark affair.

The company met at half-past eleven at “St. Ger-

main's” (Major Langrishe's bungalow), and Mrs. Brande, who was supplying the most expensive portion of the feast, felt it a *little* hard to be received as a guest by the woman who was only bringing crockery and table-cloths,—indeed, all the hostesses were secretly restive and displeased. The ladies dipped their hands into a basket, and each drew out a man's name (their fate) on a slip of paper; and although Lalla believed that she had thrust him well down to the bottom, with a little twist in the paper, so that she could recognise it herself, Honor drew the prize, in the shape of Sir Gloster Sandilands, to that gentleman's transparent delight. Subsequently Honor offered to exchange him, or draw again, when Lalla sharply assured her that “there was some mistake,—that his name had been written twice, and that she had also drawn the Baronet.” Finally it was arranged that Honor and Lalla should divide,—Honor to ride to the picnic with Mr. Jervis and Lalla with Sir Gloster, and exchange cavaliers on the return journey. Thus the affair was amicably settled. Honor would have been thankful to have avoided the Baronet altogether; she had more than a dim idea that he liked her, and he was always talking to her about his place at home and his mother, and saying how much he wished that he could introduce her to both. Mrs. Brande could not complain that he did not call: on one pretext or other he came every day, bringing a book or a paper, or looking in to ask the name of some wild flower, or for a cup of tea, or without any excuse at all, but simply to sit and stare at Honor Gordon.

Mrs. Brande was not quite such a blind bat as some people supposed. This possible match had some advantages. It would all but be the death of Mrs. Langrishe! Her niece would be Lady Sandilands. But, on the other hand, she could not bear to lose Honor. Shirani had its eyes wide open also, and Mrs. Daubeny had countermanded her daughter's two new dresses.

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At last the *cortège* set out for the scene of their next meal,—some riding, some on foot, many ladies in dandies. The distance was five miles, through leafy dells, green glades, and steep paths cut out through the forest. Captain Waring had drawn the heiress, and was happy; Sir Gloster was with Lalla, who was radiant. There was a considerable distance between some couples, whilst others kept as close together as a girls' school.

"I did not know that dogs were asked to picnics!" exclaimed a querulous voice from a dandy, coming up behind Miss Gordon, and Mr. Jervis, and Ben.

"Ben had a special card of invitation all to himself, Mrs. Dashwood," replied his owner.

"Well, I trust he is the only one of his species that has been thus honoured, and that it is not going to be a precedent."

"Don't you like dogs?" enquired Jervis.

"No; I'm desperately afraid of them, and they seem to know it. The only dog I could possibly bring myself to tolerate would be a dog without teeth! Well, I must be pushing on. I hope you are making yourself very agreeable to Miss Gordon, Mr. Jervis," she added.

"I'm afraid not; my stock of ideas is rather low. Perhaps you can suggest some novel and interesting topic."

"Your own life and adventures," cried the lady as she passed ahead of them; "try that."

"What were we talking about?" said Jervis. "Shall we go back to the last remark but six?"

"Easier said than done," rejoined his companion, gaily. "We must start a fresh subject."

"Well, I doubt if my life and adventures would be of thrilling interest," he continued, turning to Honor; and it struck her that she had never once heard her present companion allude in any way to his home or his belongings. This was a beautiful opening if he would but avail himself of it.

"Mrs. Dashwood has set me a stiff task. It is not every one's fortune to have an adventurous career." (If all tales were true, sensational events had largely punctuated the lady's own history.) "Now, which would you rather have, interesting falsehoods or very dull truths?"

"Neither, I think."

"And what about your life and adventures?"

"Oh, I have spent most of my days in a quiet little village, and can scarcely recall a single incident, except that I once upset the donkey-cart!"

"I can go one better, as they say, for I have upset a coach!" Then he coloured and added hastily, and as if he deprecated any questions, "I, too, have led a commonplace life. I was born out here, and was not sent home until I was six, and I find my native tongue has come back to me."

"It has, indeed. I have often been amazed at your extraordinary fluency in talking Hindustani. I thought that you had a marvellous talent for languages."

"Which I have not,—nor indeed for anything."

"Miss Paske says that you have a talent for silence," said Honor, demurely.

"Miss Paske's sayings are being quoted all over the place with the weight of so many proverbs! She says women do *all* their thinking in church. She declares that her sex lie from timidity, and nothing else. Shall I continue?"

"No; I should prefer your own original remarks to Miss Paske at second-hand," said Honor,—though I confess that I am responsible for introducing her into the conversation. After you came from India, what did you do?"

"I went to school, from school to college; then I lived in London, off and on, till I came out here. Our joint lives and adventures don't amount to much. I am always

longing for some uncommon experience; but such things seem to fight shy of me."

"Look! There is poor Mrs. Sladen on that horrid pulling pony," exclaimed Honor, suddenly. "She is dreadfully afraid of it, but dare not say so——"

"Being between the devil and the deep sea?"

"Which is the deep sea,—Colonel Sladen or the Bud-mash?" asked the young lady with an air of innocent enquiry.

"Whichever you please. I believe ages ago, when he was young and active, Sladen was a first-class man on a horse, and rode races. Who would think it to look at him now,—he weighs about seventeen stone!"

"And completely upsets the old theory, that fat people are always good-natured!"

"He is keen enough about horses and ponies still; you may notice that he has always good animals."

"Good to look at," amended Miss Gordon, quickly.

"Yes, and to go as well; and as he cannot ride them to sell, as he used to do once, he now thrusts poor unfortunate Mrs. Sladen into the saddle."

"The Noah's Ark animals have not been so badly paired," continued the young man. "Please look at the dāk-bungalow fowl walking with the Europe ham! Do you think the combination was premeditated?"

"No; purely accidental, I should imagine. I must say that I think it is a shame the way people are given nicknames."

"I suppose it is,—an idle amusement for idle minds. I believe that I have been honoured with one or two new names. I don't mind in the least, and I happen to know for a fact that Waring is extremely pleased with his."

"Which is more than would be the case with most people; for instance, do you suppose that Miss Cook would be pleased to hear that she is known as 'good plain Cook'?"

"Well, you know our nurses used to tell us that it is better to be good than beautiful; and here we are!"

The rendezvous was now reached, Honor and her companion being almost the last to arrive. There was a superb and uninterrupted view of the snows; but the sight of something to eat would have been preferred by some folk. What had become of the coolies and the tiffin? The table-cloths were spread (and even decorated), but, save for some bowls of salad and a meagre allowance of rolls, nothing eatable was to be seen.

Enquiries were made, and at last the dreadful news leaked out,—at first by degrees, and was then officially confirmed. The luncheon had been lost!

Mrs. Langrishe and Mrs. Brande's Khansamahs—who wore at the head of affairs—were deadly rivals. Mrs. Langrishe's man wished to be leader; like his mistress, he laid down the law. He ordered every one's coolies and servants to place themselves under his directions. "Instead of being quiet and shamed, as he ought to have been, the—the noker (*i.e.*, servant) of a Mem Sahib who only sent empty plates." This was the idea of Mrs. Brande's Khansamah, and to his opinion he gave loud and angry utterance. A desperate quarrel ensued. He said the lunch was to be sent to one place, Mrs. Brande's man declared as emphatically that it was to be despatched to another. The latter was the most powerful, and carried his point,—and what was worse, carried all the other servants and coolies away with him! At this moment they were carefully laying out a really excellent repast at a favourite rendezvous exactly seven miles on the other side of Shirani, and twelve from the present hungry company.

Mrs. Langrishe's fare—yes, it had leaked out—was all that was to be set before them!

Some people were extremely angry. Colonel Sladen—who had valued his thirst at ten rupees; not that

any one was anxious to purchase it—was really almost beside himself. Sir Gloster, although he was in love, looked desperately glum. "Ben" Brande, I must honestly confess, was visibly disappointed,—dry bread and salad were not in his line, and he had affectionate recollections of a delicious smell from his mistress's cook-house. Some people laughed. Honor and her companion were amongst the most hilarious.

Mrs. Langrishe was shown in her true colours for once, and had retired into somewhat mortified retreat under a neighbouring rock. Mrs. Brande was overwhelmed. "Where," she asked, with tears in her voice, "was her Khansamah? Where were her raised pies? her Grecian salad? her iced asparagus?" But though her hospitable soul was vexed, she was not sorry that her rival's generous share should be thus set forth before every eye.

The party, on the whole, took this unparalleled catastrophe uncommonly well. They ate dry bread with or without salt, drank water, and wound up with lettuces. Afterwards the men smoked themselves into complete serenity. If there had only been tea, but, alas, the tea had followed the infamous example of the champagne.

Naturally, such a lunch had not taken long to despatch. What was to be done? How was the next empty hour to be put in?

And here Miss Lalla Paake came forward and threw herself into the gap; in after-days her aunt always credited Lalla with *one* good action.

Rising, without waiting to catch any one's eye, she slowly sauntered off with her little swaggering air, and mounting a mossy rock and arranging herself in a picturesque attitude, despatched a cavalier for her banjo, which she presently began to thrum, and had soon, as she desired, collected a crowd. When she had assembled a sufficiently large audience, she struck up a nigger melody with admirable art and liveliness, and instantly

every male voice was joining in the chorus. Mrs. Langrishe and Mrs. Brande arrived together upon the scene, and beheld the sprightly Lalla, the centre of attraction, mounted on an impromptu throne, surrounded by admirers! Such moments were some of her unhappy aunt's few compensations. Oh, if one of these admirers would but come forward and ask for the delicate, wiry little hand now so skilfully thrumming a ranche melody!

The fair songstress made a charming picture; she had the family instinct for effect: her supple figure was thrown into delightful relief by a dense green background, and one pretty little foot dangled carelessly over a slab of rock,—such a pretty little foot in such a pretty little shoe.

And where was Mrs. Brande's niece? Standing among the crowd, a mere spectator of her rival's success. All at once Lalla suddenly handed her banjo to Sir Gloster and said, briskly,—

"Now, who would like their fortunes told? Please don't all speak together."

"Lalla is really marvellous," whispered Mrs. Langrishe to her companion. "She has made quite a study of palmistry and is most successful."

Mrs. Brande looked severely incredulous, but she could see that Lalla was now closely invested by a circle of outspread palms and a clamouring crowd of would-be clients. (Some people declared that this accomplishment was merely an excuse on Miss Paake's part for holding men's hands, and that she knew absolutely nothing of the gipsy's art, but was a shrewd judge of character and made up cleverly as she went along.) Also another notable and highly suspicious fact: she invariably meted out the most alarming fortunes to those she did not like. She appeared to take a vindictive pleasure in calmly expatiating on their impending

calamities, and made the most sinister announcements with a smile.

At present she was examining Mrs. Brande's hand with a puckered, thoughtful brow.

She had not time to do all, she declared, and those she did undertake must be entirely of her own selection.

"You have had an unexpected share of this world's goods," she stated at last, raising her voice so that every syllable was audible. "You will always be well-to-do, but your present hopes will be disappointed. In the course of time your life will undergo a change. You are threatened with softening of the brain; yes, your head line runs down upon the moon; you will probably be an incurable idiot and bedridden for many years."

"Thank you," cried Mrs. Brande, snatching away her fat hand. "That will do me for the present." And she fell back among the crowd, muttering disjointed sentences that sounded like "London—had up in police court, fortune-telling against the law—six months' hard labour." But Mrs. Brande's terrible fate and smothered indignation failed to dissuade others in answer to Miss Lalla's clear

"The next."

Miss Ryder, a pretty girl with fair hair and pathetic blue eyes, came timidly forward and gazed pleadingly at the oracle.

"Yes. Humph!" critically examining Miss Ryder's pink palm. "Your head is entirely governed by your heart, and, oh, dear me! there is a dreadful cross on the heart line; a broken marriage. No," turning the hand sideways, "I see no marriage line on your hand, but a great many small worries; truthfulness is not an attribute,—no; you will live long and enjoy fairly good health."

Miss Ryder shrank back with a distinctly sobered countenance, and, in answer to the fortune-teller's desire, Mark Jervis was pushed forward. He tendered his

hand reluctantly, and only for the Englishman's usual hatred of a fuss would have withheld it altogether. Miss Paske disliked Mr. Jervis with his cool, ambiguous manner; he was a more hanger-on, scarcely worth powder and shot, but he was a friend of Honor Gordon's, and she would make him ridiculous for her benefit.

"Oh, what a hand!" she exclaimed, with a scornful laugh. "A fair enough head line, a great capacity for holding your tongue, especially on any subject concerning yourself; you do not think it necessary to tell the whole truth on all occasions."

This was a palpable home thrust, for in the face of half Shirani Mark Jervis coloured visibly. "Secret, clear-headed, with great self-command. Yes, you would make a fine conspirator, and I think you are a bit of an impostor." Again the colour deepened in the subject's tan cheek. "Line of heart nil. Fate much broken, I see; the mark of some kind of imprisonment; a life solitary and apart." And holding the palm nearer to her eyes, "There is a great and unexpected change of fortune in store for you which entails trouble. And there is the mark of a violent death, too, or you will be the cause of another person's. The lines," dropping his hand with a hopeless gesture, "are really too faint to read anything more with success."

"Thanks awfully; it is very good of you to let me down so easily. I know you see a halter in my hand, but have wished to spare my feelings."

Lalla looked at him imperiously; he was laughing. How dared he laugh at her?

"Now, Sir Gloster, it is your turn," beckoning to him graciously.

Sir Gloster thrust out a very large, soft, white hand, and said, "This is worse than the stool of repentance. If you discover anything very bad, I implore you to whisper it in my ear, my dear Miss Paske."

"Now, this really is a hand!" she exclaimed, looking round as if she was surprised to find that it was not a foot. "You have a splendid head line." Sir Gloster coloured consciously and glanced surreptitiously at Honor, as much as to say, "I hope you heard *that*!"

"Quite a commanding intellect; you could do almost anything you chose, and are likely to be successful in your aims. A strong will; a magnificent line of fate. Yes, yes, yes, *all* the good things! You will marry a fair wife; you will meet her in India; in fact, you have met her already. You had some illnesses before you were ten."

"That's safe," scoffed Mrs. Brande from the background: "teething and measles; I could have told that!"

"You have really a splendid hand," pursued Lalla. "I should like to make a cast of it."

"She would like to have it altogether," grunted Colonel Sladen to his immediate neighbour.

"Now, Captain Waring, for you?" cried the oracle, invitingly.

Captain Waring, smiling, prosperous, perfectly ready to be amused, stepped forward.

"A fine broad palm! A magnificent line of fate; great riches are strongly marked; rather susceptible to our sex; a wonderful power of drawing people to you. You will not marry for some years." As he stood aside, Lalla said,—

"Last, but not least, Miss Gordon. Oh, come along, Miss Gordon!" beckoning with an imperious finger.

"Thank you, I would rather not be done," she answered, stiffly.

"What?" enquired young Jervis in an undertone, "not be butchered to make a station's holiday?"

"Oh, nonsense!" persisted Lalla, rather shrilly. "Your aunt has been 'done,' as you call it, and I am anxious to

see what type your hand belongs to; it's sure to be artistic."

"There is a nice little bait for you," whispered Jervis. "Surely you cannot refuse *that*."

"Oh, Miss Gordon, we all want to hear your fortune," cried several voices; and in spite of her unwillingness, Honor soon found herself in Miss Paske's clutches.

"Ahem! Artistic, yes; a dark hand; a *little* deceitful; not much heart; very ambitious. I see some disease, like small-pox, or a bad accident in store for you. You will marry when you are about forty. Let me look again. No, you and your husband will *not* agree. You will live long and die suddenly."

"How I wish some one could tell Miss Paske's fortune!" cried Captain Waring, with unusual animation. "Shall I try?" suddenly seizing it. "Great vivacity; despotic will; love of admiration; line of heart ail, and the girdle of Venus—oh, oh——"

"Oh, nonsense!" wrenching it away impatiently. "Here is Mr. Joy, who knows something *far* more interesting,—a new and much shorter way of going home."

Yes, this was seemingly an important piece of intelligence. There was a decided alacrity about getting under way. Hunger is a vulgar but a very human weakness, and soon every one set off in the wake of scatter-brained Toby and Miss Paske, and nothing but a few scraps of newspaper and cigar-ends marked the conclusion of what is known to this day in Shirani as the "great starvation picnic."

CHAPTER XXII.

TOBY JOY'S SHORT CUT.

HONOR GORDON and Sir Gloster sent their ponies on ahead, as the path was all down-hill, and elected to walk. To tell the truth, the gentleman was a nervous rider and preferred pedestrian exercise. It was an ominous fact, that whereas Sir Gloster had closely accompanied Miss Gordon and her escort on their way to the picnic,—so much so, indeed, as to be almost always within earshot,—he now brusquely shook off any of the party who evinced a desire to attach themselves to him and his companion.

"Miss Paske was most amusing as a fortune-teller and all that sort of thing," he remarked; "but were you not made uneasy about your future?"

"Not a bit," contemptuously kicking a little cone down-hill; "she made it up as she went along."

"She was awfully down on young Jervis. What a career she painted for him, poor beggar!"

"The wish was doubtless father to the thought. She does not like him."

"And the idea of her saying that you would not be married till you were forty! As if you could not marry to-morrow if you chose."

Honor began to feel uncomfortable and to long for the presence of a third person. She made a lively gesture of dissent as she prepared to scramble down an exceedingly steep and greasy footpath.

"You know you could," pursued Sir Gloster, seizing her hand by way of giving her assistance, and nearly precipitating her to mother earth. "For example, you might marry me!"

Miss Paske had just assured him that he would succeed in his aims, and he was resolved to test her prophecy without delay.

"Oh, Sir Gloster!" exclaimed the young lady, vainly trying to release her fingers.

"You will let me keep this little hand forever? I fell in love with you almost from the first. You are beautiful and musical, and would understand at once the fitness of things. My mother would like you. Do you think you could care for me, and all that sort of thing?"

"Oh, Sir Gloster!" she repeated, pausing on the path, a sudden red suffusing her cheeks and looking at him with real dismay. "I like you,—but not in that way."

"Perhaps I have been too sudden. If I were to wait a week or two. Let me talk to your aunt."

"No, no, please," with anxious repudiation. "It would make no difference. I am sorry, but I never, never, could care for you as you wish."

Mrs. Sladen and Mark Jervis, who were behind descending the same zigzag path, happened to be immediately above the pair. Sounds ascend, and they were at the moment silent, when through the leaves and the cool evening air a voice seemed wafted to their feet, which said,—

"I have been too sudden. If I were to wait a week or two. Let me talk to your aunt."

Mrs. Sladen and her companion looked straight at one another, and became guiltily crimson. There was a moment's pause ere the man exclaimed, "There is no use in our pretending we are deaf. We have just heard what was never meant for other ears, and I'm awfully sorry."

"So am I," she answered,— "sorry in one way, glad in another."

"I doubt if Mrs. Brande would share your joy," he retorted, with a significant smile.

"Of course we will keep it a dead secret."

"Of course," emphatically. "On the whole," with a short laugh, "I am not sure that it is not safer to write."

"Is this what you will do?" she enquired, playfully.

"I don't know, but I certainly have had a lesson not to try my fate coming home from a crowded picnic. What a dismal walk those two will have! Can you imagine a more unpleasant *titte-d-titte*? What can they talk about now?"

"Their walk, and every one's, seems ended here," remarked Mrs. Sladen, pointing to a crowd of coolies, dandies, men, ladies, and ponies, who were all jammed together and making a great noise.

"Of course this is Toby Joy's short cut, and most likely a practical joke," exclaimed Jervia. "I believe he was at the bottom of the lost lunch, too."

The much-boasted short cut was likely to prove the proverbial longest way round, and now afforded a very disagreeable surprise to the company of merry pleasure-seekers. They had been descending a densely-wooded shoulder of a hill with the cheery confidence of ignorance, to where at one point an artificially banked up and stone-faced road crossed a deep gorge.

The path, owing to the action of the rain, had slipped down, and there was now but a precarious footing across the breach,—barely wide enough for a single pony, and that a steady one. Above towered the hill, almost sheer; below lay blue shale precipices, clothed in fir-trees, bushes, and brambles. To a hill coolie, or a person with a good head, it was passable,—at least twenty had gone over, including Mrs. Brande, in her dandy, who waved her hand jauntily as she was carried across. She was a plucky woman as far as precipices were concerned.

Some who were nervous hesitated on the brink; they were torn between two conflicting emotions, hunger and fear. Many were actually beginning to retrace their

steps. Toby Joy, on his hard-mouthed yellow "tat," was riding backwards and forwards over the chasm, to demonstrate "how easy it was," and bragging and joking, and making himself so conspicuous that some of his misguided victims, including Colonel Sladen, would not have been at all sorry if he had vanished down the khud!

Colonel Sladen's hunger stimulated his temper. The traditional bear with a sore head was a playful and gentle animal in comparison to him at the present moment. He had been a noted horseman in his day; but being now much too heavy to ride, he was fond of bragging of his ponies, and thrusting that light weight, his unhappy wife, into positions that made her blood run ice, and then he would boast and say, "Pooh! the pony is a lamb! My wife rides him,—rides him with a thread, sir;" and he would straddle his legs, and swagger about the club, and subsequently sell the animal at a high figure.

"A nasty place to ride across! Not a bit of it; it's safer than doing it on foot. These hill ponies never make mistakes."

This he had remarked, in his gruffest tone, to Captain Waring, whose fair companion was literally trembling on the brink. "Wait, and just you watch how my wife will do it on the budmash,—she will show you all the way. Milly," he bellowed, looking up the hill, "come along, come along!"

"Oh," she exclaimed, turning a face as white as death on Mark, "I really dare not ride across that place! I have no nerve now, and this is the shying pony."

"Come on! Don't you see that you are stopping up the road?" roared her lord and master, indicating the various people who were sneaking back. Then, as she joined him, he added in a lower tone, "I would not be such a coward to save my life."

"I am a coward," she muttered to Mark with a ghastly

smile; "and I doubt if even that will save my life." And she began to put her pony in motion.

"It is only fifty yards across," said Jervis, encouragingly; "it will be over in two minutes. I'll get off and lead your pony, and I guarantee to take you over safely."

"Are you going?" cried Colonel Sladen, impatiently. "Get along, and give the other women a lead. Oh!" to her escort, who had dismounted, "are you going too? Quite unnecessary."

There was a sudden cessation of talking, argument, grumbling, chaff, and laughter. A curious silence fell on both sides of the "bad bit." People looked on with awed, grave, or excited faces, as if they were witnessing some sensational drama, whilst they watched with breathless interest a notoriously timid little woman, on a notorious ill-tempered pony, risking her life in obedience to her husband's commands. She might get across safely, then again she might not. The chances were about even.

"Come along," said Jervis cheerfully, taking the budmash by the head with an air that showed that pink-eyed, red-haired gentleman he was not going to stand any nonsense.

"Shut your eyes," continued the young man, "and imagine that you are on a turnpike-road; you will be at the other side before you really think that you have started. We are half-way across now."

Yes, half of the journey had been satisfactorily accomplished. The budmash led like a lamb; the tension of expectation had relaxed, spectators were beginning to breathe freely, and even to turn away, when all at once there was a sound of galloping, a wild yell, a crash, a rattle of shale, and Mrs. Sladen, the pony, and Jervis had vanished down the khud! There had been a momentary vision of two struggling people, four madly kicking shining shoes, and they had disappeared into a chaos of trees, and were completely lost to sight.

And what had caused the accident?

Why, Toby Joy, of course. Toby, who had been indulging in an outburst of tomfoolery, and riding backwards and forwards, dangling his feet out of the stirrups, and giving views halloes, had taken too many liberties with a long-suffering animal, who was extremely anxious to get home, who was on the wrong side of the road for the tenth time, and who, when he at last "got a load" from another pony, was simply not to be denied. His reckless master had left the reins on his neck, being, like every one else, an eager spectator of the martyrdom of Mrs. Sladen. Cupid had suddenly dashed forward, thundered down the declivity, cannoned violently against the budmash, and hurled him and his companions into space.

For a moment there was an absolute silence, which was broken by Colonel Sladen, who roared out,—

"My pony is killed!"

"And your wife!" cried Honor, who was standing beside him. "Is your wife nothing?" she repeated with passionate energy.

In a second a swarm of coolies, Sycees, and their masters, led (to do him justice) by Toby Joy, were clambering down the jungle. Though very steep, it was not a sheer descent, and presently there came a shout of "All right!"

The bushes, brambles, and long-twining hill-creepers had broken the fall, and saved them.

The first to be brought up was Mrs. Sladen, minus her hat, assisted by two gentlemen, and looking exceedingly white and small. Next came Jervis, with a streak of blood on his face and a torn coat; last of all the pony emerged, struggling, scrambling, driven and dragged by about twenty energetic Sycees.

"You are not badly hurt, I hope?" said Honor, who had hurried across the broken path, and was the first to greet her friend as she was helped up to the bank.

"Not she," rejoined Colonel Sladen, brusquely. "She has only had the breath knocked out of her! Give her some whiskey and she will be all right."

As his wife sat down on a flat stone, and after bravely trying to reassure every one, suddenly burst into loud hysterical sobbing, he added, "How can you behave in this cry-baby way, Milly? You are not a bit hurt,—it was all your own fault." (Every misfortune or mistake was invariably "her own fault.") "If you had not stayed shilly-shallying, but started when I told you——"

"Oh, shut up, will you!" interrupted Jervis, in a furious undertone.

Colonel Sladen became almost black in the face; but before he could recover his breath Captain Waring broke into the group.

"Hullo, Mark, old chap, you are looking rather cheap; any bones broken?"

"I'm not much the worse,—we had a wonderful escape, the brambles saved us and the root of a big tree—my wrist——" becoming rather white.

"Your wrist!" repeated a doctor. "Let us have a look at it! And I see, you have cut your head. Oh, ho! the wrist is fractured,—a simple fracture; it won't be much. I'll set it now," which he proceeded to do on the spot,—an operation superintended by bystanders with deepest interest. Colonel Sladen watched with jealous scrutiny to see if the patient would flinch; but no, alas, he was doomed to disappointment. To tell the truth, as far as he was concerned, he would not have minded if the insolent young hound had broken his neck!

Mrs. Brande, who was always well to the front in cases of accidents or sickness, had long abandoned her dandy, suggested one person's flask, another person's smelling-bottle, was full of most anxious solicitude.

"I'll be all right," said Jervis, looking round the eager circle. "Well, before I'm twice married, as old nurses

say. Miss Paske," suddenly catching sight of her bright, questioning, little marmoset eyes, "it would have been only friendly of you to have prepared us for *this*."

"It's all very fine for you to laugh it off," protested Mrs. Brande. "You just get into my dandy this instant. I can walk,—indeed it will do me good,—and you shall come home with me straight, and I'll nurse you."

But Jervis declared that no nursing was required, and would not hear of this arrangement. When his wrist had been set, and tied up with splints of wood and various handkerchiefs, he got on his pony and jogged away as briskly as the best.

The recent scene had not occupied more than twenty-five minutes, and soon every one was *en route*,—every one but Sir Gloster, who had mysteriously vanished from the crowd, and had been one of the earliest to retreat and hurry home. Wise Mrs. Langrishe, who had not gone by the short cut, had seen him trot stolidly past her, alone, looking extraordinarily solemn and morose, and drew her own conclusions. What a goose the girl had been! He might yet be caught at the rebound,—stranger things had happened. Oh, if Lalla would only behave herself!

Two days after the great picnic Mrs. Brande came into her drawing-room, where Mark Jervis, with his arm in a sling, was having tea with her niece and Mrs. Sladen. She looked quite flushed and upset as she said,—

"What do you think, Honor? Here is Sir Gloster's visiting card, 'P. P. C.,' sent by a servant. I hear he has gone away for good. Don't you think he might have had the manners to call, after all the good dinners he has had here?" And she seemed on the verge of tears.

"But he did call very often, aunt," replied Honor, without raising her eyes from Ben.

"Well, he never came to say good-bye; and I met him yesterday at Manockjee's, buying tinned butter, and sausages and stores. He seemed to want to hide; I

thought it was because he was ashamed of my seeing him bargaining down the butter and cheese. So I just went after him to put him at his ease, but somehow I missed him. I think he got away through the verandah where they keep the old furniture."

"He has gone to the snows, no doubt," remarked Mrs. Sladen, exchanging a swift glance with her confederate.

"Has he? There is something very queer and sudden about the whole thing. I cannot make it out."

She was not nearly as clever as Mrs. Langrishe, who had "made it out" at a glance—and held her tongue. Indeed, Mrs. Brande was almost the only person in Shirani who did not know that Sir Gloster Sandilands had proposed for her niece the day of the great starvation picnic, and had been refused!

CHAPTER XXIII.

CAPTAIN WARING'S ALTERNATIVE.

MARK JERVIS had resisted all Mrs. Brande's invitations to "take him home and nurse him." He would be far better, quoth she, in her comfortable spare room, with the best of fresh eggs and new milk, than in that smoky Haddon Hall at the mercy of his bearer, his meals irregular, and no comforts. She was well accustomed to nursing young men. How many junior civilians, brought to the verge of the grave by India's new scourge, typhoid, had owed their lives to Sara Brande!—young men in her husband's district who, just out from home, had scorned such precautions as the purchase of a filter and a cow. What tales, if she had chosen, could Mrs. Brande have related of these same reckless invalids! How at their first weak, but convalescent and ravenous, stage they

had been so happy, so amazed, to find themselves yet in the land of the living, that they had babbled freely to their kind, sympathetic nurse, forgetting how often they had laughed at "old Sally Brande." She seemed an angel, a more than mother to them, *now*. Reclining on sofas and long chairs, in clothes much too large, twilight, or especially moonlight, often found them murmuring experiences and confidences into their nurse's attentive ear,—“of girls at home,” of debts, of scrapes, of good resolutions, of “new leaves” that were about to be turned over,—were not all these things written in the chronicles of Mrs. Brande's memory? Afterwards, when restored to life and vigor, with a sharpened appetite for life's enjoyments, these patients marvelled at themselves, their poor weak wagging tongues, their indiscretions! They felt *hot* as they thought of the secrets which were buried in Mrs. Brande's bosom; but they were always polite to her, never would suffer a word in her disfavour, and many of them loved her. The cards, letters, and mementos she received at Christmas were astonishing in variety and in the difference of post-marks, from Tongoo to Suakim, from Kohat to Galle,—these tokens of affectionate remembrance poured in from what Mrs. Brande was wont to term “her boys.” She (very low be it whispered) was fond of young men! She liked Mark Jervis particularly, and would gladly have enrolled him in her brigade,—for her boys were not merely Indian civilians; she had her recruits in the police, the opium department, the army, and the law.

This friendless young Englishman actually held out against notes (or *chits*), messages, even visits, and steadily refused to “come and be nursed.”

His cousin was more at home these latter days; he was packing and preparing for a move.

“I say, Mark,” he said, “your wrist will be all right in about ten days; so Kane says. I advise you to think



better of it and follow on to Simla. It's a ripping place, very different to dead-and-alive Shirani. I must go to-morrow, you know. I've promised to escort Mrs. Atherton and Miss Potter. The roads between this and the station are broken, and they are in a deadly fright. We shall do the whole journey together, and I have now only to ask and have."

"That is satisfactory; but as far as I'm concerned I'm a fixture here," replied Mark,—“and you know why. I wrote to my father again urgently, and told him that time was flying, that I was going back in October, but I would wait here till then."

"So you may. I know the style your father is, Mark. He is a man who has lived so long out here he has become fossilised,—nothing outside India appeals to him, not even his son. There are dozens like him; the easy-going life has penetrated to their very bones. He has his well-trained servants, his excellent food and liquor, his cheroots or his huka, his *Pioneer*, his long arm-chair, his pet grievance. He wants no more, least of all a smart young chap with all sorts of advanced *fin de siècle* ideas, to come and rout him out."

"This is a fancy sketch, Clarence."

"Well, grant it. I will draw you a true portrait from life, and I could draw you half a dozen."

"We will have one to begin with. Don't be too long about it, for I have promised to meet Scrope at four o'clock sharp, and I see Dum Sing waiting with the grey pony."

"Once upon a time I knew an old colonel (retired) who lived in the Milgheeries," began Waring. "All his family were out in the world,—sons in the service, daughters married, and he was left stranded. He had his garden, his ponies, some ancient chums and old retainers, and, though all his relations were at the other end of the world, he would not budge. No less than

three times he took his passage home; twice he went down to Madras, bag and baggage, accompanied by his servants. Once he was actually on board ship and in his cabin, but when they said 'Any one for the shore,' he bundled his kit together and went back in a Massulah boat. He is out here still. I recollect another instance, an old general, a regular old dorelict, clinging, as to a spar, to the last station he commanded. I saw him—and this was in the plains, mind you—going for his evening drive in his old carriage, with a pair of antediluvian horses; all alone, too. He had a venerable long white beard, and was eighty-six years of age, and fond of saying, 'Thirty years ago, when I commanded this station!' The authorities and folks in general humoured him; people are not so much hustled out here, and have time to indulge old folks' fancies. He came to all the field days, and drew up behind the saluting post in his old barouche. He thought the army was going to the dogs, I can tell you; and white helmets, white clothes, canes, so many scandalous innovations. He had a heap of relations in England, never wrote to one of them, and left all his money to the grandson of his first love and the Friend in Need Society. Your father is just another of these people, as you will see."

"Time will tell; and talking of time, Clarence, I think it is time that we should put an end to our little farce."

Clarence, who was sitting opposite to his companion and leaning his arms on a ricketty camp-table, raised his head and gazed at him rather blankly.

"Old boy, you must surely see that it has gone far enough,—in fact just a bit too far,—when Miss Paake fired a wild shot in the dark, and said that I did not consider it always necessary to tell the whole truth about myself. I felt downright guilty when she said I was a bit of an impostor. I know I blushed like a peony! The deception, small at first, has grown to a big thing.

I go by the name of 'the poor relation,' and all the mothers fight shy of me!"

"And is not that just what you particularly aimed at?" demanded Clarence, sharply. "I think the whole scheme has worked capitally. I'm sure I have played my part well, and so have you," with a loud laugh of unnatural hilarity.

"Yes; but I feel as if I was acting a lie, though I have never actually uttered one in so many words. I have never said that I was poor——"

"Just as I pay the bills and have a prosperous air; but I never said I was rich."

Nevertheless, he acted and spoke precisely as a man to whom money was no object. Nor was it, being not his own, but Mr. Pollitt's.

"When I started to play polo, men were amazed," continued Jervis; "when I gave fifty rupees for the new harmonium, people looked astonished; the peon with the church books who gathers up our Sunday offerings gazes at my chit for four rupees doubtfully as he hands it to me. I know that he wonders at my extravagance, and if I can afford it. We are going to give a bachelors' ball as a set-off against the married ladies' picnic——"

"I hope the supper will be within ten miles of the ball-room," interposed Waring, with a grin.

"And Hawks, the secretary, a very good sort, said to me quite confidentially, 'You are not a rich Johnnie. I'll let you down easy; I'll take fifteen rupees.'"

"Yes, and what do you think of that young brute Skegga, who has been going steadily to everything ever since he came up,—breakfasts, teas, tiffins, dinners, balls,—an ugly, pudding-faced chap?"

"Yes, fearfully handicapped by his hands and feet."

"He was asked to join, and make some return for the great hospitality that had been shown to bachelors. He said 'No,' promptly,—he would not give an anna. And

why, do you suppose?" pausing dramatically. "Because, in his opinion, a young man was a sufficient reward in himself for any amount of civilities!"

"Mean beast! He was lunching at the Brande's yesterday. But to return to our subject," feeling conscious that his clever companion was slipping away from it. "You are off to-morrow, and before we go I really think we ought to take the opportunity of each appearing in our true and real character. Are you, like Barkis, willing?"

Clarence coloured a deep red and looked annoyed.

"No, I am not willing," he said at last. "We have only a few months more to play our parts, and I vote we see them out. I adopted the rôle of purse-bearer and leader to satisfy a caprice of yours, as you know, and I mean to stick to it till we are in Bombay harbour."

"Well, I am very sorry now I was such a sensitive, vain idiot as to get into a regular funk, simply because a few third-rate globe-trotters threw themselves at my money-bags. Why on earth did you not tell me that they were not a true specimen of Indian society? There are heaps of wealthy men out here,—we have met them, heirs to titles or really distinguished fellows,—and no one bothers about them. I was too conceited and too easily scared."

"It's too late to think of that now!" with easy scorn.

"No; better late than never. I intend to tell the Brandes and Mrs. Sladen, and Clifford, Scrope, Villiers, and one or two other fellows, that I am not what I seem."

"You must reckon with me first," said Clarence, hoarsely. "Your confidences, which mean blazoning the truth from one end of Shirani to the other, will play the very devil with me!"

"Why? What do you mean?" asked Jervis, with an air of cool surprise.

"Cannot you see? I've dropped into my old set and

my old temptations. I cannot resist a bit of a gamble. The name of 'millionaire,' given for fun, has gained me credit. I owe money all over the place,—rent, club, bills, Manockjee,—three thousand rupees would not clear me; and if it comes out, say to-morrow, that I am their dear customer of former days, without a penny to bless myself with, they will all be on me like a pack of hounds. Give me time and I will sell the ponies well up at Simla, pick up a race or two, and marry," with a laugh, "the heiress." (Never, to quote Lord Lytton, was there a man who was an habitual gambler otherwise than notably inaccurate in his calculations of probabilities in the ordinary affairs of life. Is it that such a man has become such a chronic drunkard of hope that he sees double every chance in his favor?) "I am owed some money myself, but I must not press my creditor. However, I am safe to get it some day, and it's a tidy sum. I have a first-rate book on Goodwood,—I can't lose, and I must win. All I want is time, a long day, your honour," grinning at his companion; nevertheless, although he grinned, his mouth was working nervously at the corners.

"But surely there are a good many thousand rupees still at the agent's?" said Mark, rather blankly.

"Not a pice," was the astounding reply. "No; I was badly hit over the Liverpool, and of course I had no right to appropriate the funds in such a way. You need not tell me *that*. Gambling is a disease with me, and I cannot help it; it's worse than drink,—comes far more expensive. There ought to be a retreat for confirmed gamblers such as I am, same as for dipsomaniacs. I may as well make a clean breast of it. I hoped to land a large stake and make all square, but that brute 'Queer Customer' curled up and ran a cur in the finish, and put us all in a hole. I would give ten pounds to get shot at him. I've had confounded bad luck, and I

must say in my own defence that it was all *your* fault from first to last. You put temptation in my way; you handed over the accounts and cheque-book, and asked no questions, and, by Jove!" he concluded, with an air of virtuous resignation, "I've told you no lies,—I am cleaned out."

"And supposing your Simla schemes fall through, and you are *not* paid, and your book on Goodwood is on the wrong side, what will you do?"

Clarence simply shrugged his broad shoulders.

"How are we to pay our bills here?" enquired the other, gravely.

"I don't know."

"And our passage-money?"

"I don't know," he repeated, doggedly.

"Surely you must have some idea," urged Jervis, with a touch of asperity.

"Yes; you can write to the uncle for fresh supplies."

"No, I will not do that," returned the uncle's heir, who was rapidly losing his patience.

"There is your own allowance,—a most liberal one."

"I have not drawn it, because I thought Uncle Dan's cheque covered everything."

"And it seems that you were too sanguine."

"What have you got in your cash-box, Waring?" he demanded, sternly; "do you mean to tell me, seriously, that you are quite penniless?"

"No; I've got a thousand rupees; that will pay the servants here, take me to Simla, and keep me there quietly till events arrange themselves. I cannot pay my mess bill in Shirani,—a whopping one! You see I punished their champagne, and I was always asking guests."

A dead silence, broken only by the jingling bit of Jervis's impatient pony.

"Well, what do you propose to do to get me out of this hat? How are we both to get out of the country?"

enquired Clarence, whose effrontery was of a rare and peculiar character.

Jervis sat for some time with his hands in his pockets and a frown on his brow; at last he said,—

"I suppose, if the worst comes to the worst, I must draw out six hundred pounds, though I think it's a mean encroachment on the old man's generosity. One hundred will keep me here till we start, and the remaining five will pay mess bill, rent, passage-money, and so on. I shall tell the Brandes the truth the first time I see them, and that will be to-morrow morning."

"Then, by George, if you do," cried Clarence in a harsh, discordant voice, "you need not trouble about my passage home, for as sure as you open your lips," tugging furiously at the table-drawer as he spoke, "and expose me as a wretched impostor, a paid companion, and a beggar—Do you see this revolver?" suddenly producing one as he spoke, "I swear I'll put it to my head and blow my brains out! Here!" he continued, snatching up Mark's little prayer-book and kissing it vehemently, "I swear it on the book!"

Then he pushed away both book and weapon, and resting his elbows on the table, contemplated his *vis-à-vis* with a gray, drawn, haggard face,—a face expressing such anxiety and desperation that it was difficult to believe that it was the countenance of good-looking, popular, *débonnaire* Captain Waring.

"I don't want to drive you to anything," said Mark, who was also deadly pale. "But if I keep my lips sealed and continue to feel a mean, double-faced hound, I must have my stipulation also. It is not for the sake of any extra consideration or popularity I might gain that I wish to speak: you believe *that*? but you know I am deliberately playing a double part and sailing under false colours. It all seemed so easy and harmless at first, from sending off the valet and baggage and——"

"All that sort of thing, as Sir Gloster would say," interrupted Clarence, with a ribald laugh.

"But now it has grown from small beginnings, it leads on from one deception to another; I am almost afraid to open my mouth; I never dare to allude to hunting or yachting, or anything that sounds like money, or even to speak of my uncle or my home, for fear people may think that I am lying!"

"You never wanted to make these *confidences* when you were in Columbo or Calcutta!" sneered Clarence. "You have been exciting some one's interest, eh? And pray what is your stipulation?"

"That I may tell the whole truth to one person."

"As a dead, dead secret. I don't mind if you do, as long as it is not a woman."

"But it is a woman," said Jervis, quickly.

"Ah! I need not ask her name,—Miss Gordon," exclaimed Waring, with a peculiar grating emphasis. "Now, there's a girl I don't like; nasty, snubby way with her, and the most haughty smile I ever beheld."

"Her ways and her smiles are not likely to concern you much, I fancy, but she is the girl I wish to marry if I can prevail upon her to accept me."

"*Prevail!* and you doubt if you would prevail without telling her of the coin?" cried Clarence, derisively.

"She is the last person in the world to care for money; in fact, it is a disadvantage in her eyes, as I happen to know."

"The young woman must be indeed a *rara-avis!*" observed Clarence, turning up his eyes.

"But," pursued the other, "if I ask her to accept me, I should like her to know all about me."

"Pollitt's pearl barley and all! You don't think that will go against the *grain*,—see. Eh? Not bad!"

"I wish you could be serious for five moments," exclaimed Jervis, angrily, "and let me finish what I am



saying. I am not the least ashamed of Pollitt's pearl barley, nor would I begin by having a secret from her."

"Whatever you might come to later, eh? And Uncle Dan,—have you thought of him? Is he to be let into the news about the young lady, or will you begin by having a secret from him?"

"Of course I shall tell him at once."

"Oh, very proper indeed! Well, now, I suppose we have talked over everything, and at any rate I have talked myself into first-class thirst. You are to keep five hundred pounds to settle up with in case of accidents, and you are to continue to hold your tongue and keep up your present rôle with every one but a certain young lady; that's about it?"

"Yes, I suppose that's about it," acquiesced Mark, rising and taking his cap.

As Captain Waring watched him hurrying towards his waiting pony, mounting and galloping away up the compound, he said to himself as he deliberately struck a fusee,—

"Well, Clarence Waring, I think you got considerably the best of *that* bargain. You have the brains, and if you had money and opportunity you could do great things." Nevertheless, he took up the revolver and looked at it with a sober face ere he returned it to the table-drawer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"SWEET PRIMROSE IS COMING."

CAPTAIN WARING had gone down the hill, gallantly escorting Mrs. Atherton and Miss Potter, and followed by an innumerable retinue of servants, ponies, and baggage.

He left a blank behind him, also an unpaid mess bill. His square shoulders, broad smile, and loud voice were missed in the club, verandah, and elsewhere.

He was coming back to settle up his bills, he declared, "and he left his cousin in pawn," he added, with a hearty laugh.

"Sara," said her husband, coming in from his dressing-room lathering his face,—he was always clean shaven and looked twenty-five at a distance,—*"Waring is off; that young Jervis is all by himself, he has a broken wrist and can't play polo or tennis, why on earth don't you have him up here?"*

"'Ark at the man!" appealing to Ben, who squatted beside her, helping her to dispose of her buttered toast. Mrs. Brande was seated at a little table in her own room, clad in a gorgeous dressing-gown and partaking of Chotah Haaree.

"Haven't I asked him till I am tired? I've written to him and gone to his house, and it's all no use."

"Well, I'll see what I can do," rejoined her lord and master. "That is to say, I must admit that women are sharper in these ways than we are, if you think it's all right, and there is no chance of his making a fool of himself with Honor? No fear of his falling in love, eh?" And as he calmly awaited her reply, he resumed operations with the shaving-brush.

"In love with Honor! Ha! ha! that is a good idea. If he is in love with any one it's with me, so don't say I did not put you on your guard. Honor, bless your dear simple old heart! Why, they see precious little of one another, thanks to you, who always carry him off to tennis or to talk, and when they are together, as well as I can make out, they are fighting most of the time."

"There's nothing like beginning with a little aversion, so people say," remarked Mr. Brande.

"Diversion! There won't be much for him here, poor



boy, with his lame arm. Do you remember long, long ago a Major Jervis of the Bengal Cavalry, a splendid-looking man, especially in full dress and his turban; a widower? He married again; this boy has a great resemblance to him. I wonder if he is any relation?"

"Merely his father; I asked him the first time I saw him. Jervis was A1 at rackets; I knew him rather well. He married a second time, a woman with tons of money in indigo and house property; the granddaughter of a Begum. She had a pair of eyes like hot coals, and led him a life to correspond."

"And what has become of him?"

"The boy is rather reserved, as you know, so I did not like to ask him, but as I have not heard of him for a good many years I conclude that he is dead; indeed, I am nearly certain of it."

"And the Begum's lace have not done much for the son? I hope you will get him to come here; take no refusal; it must be miserable work moping alone. All the same I shall be huffed with him if he comes for you after saying no to me."

"Sara, you are a truly consistent woman!"

"And you, P., are a truly fearful object to behold, with your face all over white. No wonder Ben is staring at you. There is the post peon; it must be late."

Mr. Brande's invitation proved irresistible, and the very next day saw Mark Jervis duly installed at Rookwood. The move occasioned no comment; his wrist was broken and he wanted looking after. The Brandes' bungalow had ever been a sort of auxiliary station hospital! The young invalid soon made himself at home, and was certainly no trouble to any one, as his hostess frankly informed him. He was interested in the fowls and pigeons; he seemed knowing about ponies; he looked on admiringly whilst Honor filled the flower-glasses, and gave his candid opinion and advice. He

played Halma with Mrs. Brande and Patience with Honor, and acted as umpire at tennis.

"Here is quite a pack of letters," said Mrs. Brande, coming into the verandah one morning and critically examining them as she spoke. "One for you, Honor, one for me, and two for Mr. Jervis. 300 Prince's Gate on the envelope," handing it to him. "Is that the new style?"

"I really don't know," receiving his uncle's epistle and sitting down on the steps beside Ben.

Mr. Brande had a pile of officials for his share, and soon every one was plunged in their correspondence.

"Uncle Pel," said his niece, looking up from a crossed and scratchy letter, "here is a long epistle from Mrs. Kerry, our rector's wife. She is going to hold a drawing-room meeting about missions, and she wishes me to tell her," reading aloud, "what I think of the prospect of Christianity in the dark heathen land. I know nothing about the matter; what is your opinion?"

"That is rather a tall order, a big question," sitting erect, sticking his eye-glass in his eye and focussing his niece. "I am sure I can tell you very little. India is many years behind the age; it is populous and isolated. The old creeds, however, are gradually being sapped. I dare say in a hundred years India will be Christian," and dropping his glass suddenly, "Britons may be Bhudists."

"Oh, Uncle Pelham, do talk seriously for once; you know I could not write home that. Mrs. Kerry," again referring to her letter, "asks particularly about the Hindoos."

"Well, you can inform her that the Hindoos are naturally a devout people and must have a religion; some are now Theists, Atheists, Agnostics, some mere coarse idolaters, who even in these days have devil worship and witch-burning; yes, within a hundred miles of a college

whose students devour Max Müller and Matthew Arnold, and the most advanced literature of the day."

"And Mahomedans?"

"Mahomedans never change, and never will change until having read history and science, they see themselves from another point of view. You can assure your friend that they, too, have their missionaries, who adopt street-preaching and tract-distribution, and that they may be found in countless bazaars expounding the teaching of the Prophet. They make many converts, and among them some Christians. Pray tell the lady *that*."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, Uncle Pelham."

"Among the Hindoos, whose caste is so firm, the social conditions of the lower orders is so wretched and unchangeable, that numbers become Mahomedans,—where all are alike, where severe asceticism is not necessary, and there are no outcasts, but scope for the indulgence of any ambition. There is your aunt's old Ayah, she does not know *what* she is. She attends Hindoo and Mahomedan feasts impartially. She believes alike in Vishnu and Mahomed; she also believes in whiskey schrab!"

"My dear Pel, how can you say such a thing!" broke in his wife, indignantly. "Don't be stuffing the child's head with such dry rubbish, but just look at *this*." And Mrs. Brande, who had risen, solemnly walked over and held out a photograph of a girl, and said, "Look here, P., never mind your missionary talk, but tell me what you think of *that*. Who do you think she is?"

"An angel to look at, at any rate," was the emphatic reply.

"Yes; did you ever see so perfect a face? Well, she is your own niece,—Fairy Gordon!"

Yes, it was, indeed, Fairy,—an exquisite picture of her, soft, *posée*, touched up, showing the best side of Fairy's face,—with Fairy's best expression.

"My dear," said Mrs. Brande, turning to Honor, "I would not exchange you for anybody; but *she* is the beauty of the family, and no two words about it. Eh, P.?"

"Beautiful indeed," he assented; "but I prefer Honor's bright little phiz and big enquiring eyes."

He was a judge of countenance, and even a flattering photograph could not deceive him; there was a cruel pinched expression about the beauty's lips.

"Come and look at this, Mr. Jervis," cried the proud aunt; "is she not lovely?"

"Yes . . . lovely," he responded. She was undoubtedly "the pretty one," though he secretly agreed with Mr. Brande.

"I wonder what Mrs. Langrishe would say to her? Eh? Eh, Honor?"

What, indeed! Honor flushed violently and smiled constrainedly, but made no reply.

"And here is her nice little letter," continued Mrs. Brande, dropping it into Honor's lap. "I must send her something, poor child."

The missive was written over two sheets, in an enormous hand,—a hand that would have befitted a giantess, and ran as follows:

"DEAR AUNT SARA,—I seem to know you so well from Honor's letters that I would like you to know a little about me, and I send you my photograph. It is considered very like me, only my hair and complexion, which Honor will tell you are my two strong points, do not come out. We devour her letters every week, and are quite familiar with Shirani and the people there, and the flowers, and the exquisite scenery, and your dear, kind self. I envy Honor her delightful home; sometimes I cry when I think of it (and you will suppose that I am very foolish), with dances, and parties, and picnics, and a pony of her own. Her life is a contrast to that of her poor little sister Fairy, who has no one to load her with kindness and gifts, and has not been to one party since May, and who must make a pair of gloves last for months. However, I am not grumbling; Honor's pleasures are mine. I feel your great generosity to

her, and am most grateful to you. When you have time, I hope you will send me your photograph,—we have not one of you,—and also a few lines to cheer up our long dull days. How I wish we could afford to go away for a change! I dare say Honor has told you that at first I was the one who was to have gone out to you; but afterwards it was decided by the prudent ones of the family (Jessie and Honor) that I was to remain at home. Still, I have always had a sort of feeling that I belonged to you, because for three whole days I was the chosen one, and could hardly eat or sleep, I was so happy. Excuse this rambling letter. I am not a bit *clever*, like the others; but I am ever your loving niece,

“FAIRY.”

“P.S.—Is Honor engaged yet? She never mentions any admirers.”

It was the epistle of a Cinderella, and yet all her life Fairy had been made the family queen. Honor's cheeks crimsoned with anger (her aunt imagined that it was the flush of shame or a guilty conscience) as she thought of the various little privations of her own and Jessie's life that Fairy might go softly. Of the miles she had tramped, the shabby clothes she had worn, for Fairy's sake. It was but the other day that she had sent her eight pounds out of her allowance, instead of spending it on that pink ball dress. Now that she was absent, there was, as Mr. Kerry had bluntly indicated, a large margin for luxuries at home. It was really too bad that Fairy should write out to simple Aunt Sara in this martyr-like vein.

Honor looked vexed as she raised her eyes and met her aunt's gaze,—an enquiring gaze.

“And so the other child wanted to come?” handing the letter from Honor to her husband. “And you never told me,—you that are so free and open. Tell me now, since her mind was so set on it, *what* prevented her?”

“Aunt Sara, Fairy is not strong,—not fit for long journeys, or excursions, late hours, or a foreign climate. Our doctor said it would be madness for her to venture,

and that was one reason. She changed her mind of her own accord. She has always been the family pet.”

“But you say one reason. What was the *other*?”

Honor now became scarlet. “It was no harm,—I would rather not say,” she stammered. “You will know some day.” And she looked desperately distressed.

“I wonder if she would come out *now*?” said Mrs. Brande, musingly. “We can put up two as easy as one. Eh, P.? The Hadfields expect Gerty in November. She might come with her, and get five or six months' fun after all. It will give her something to talk of in future, and unless I'm mistaken *she* will give people something to talk about. Eh, P.?”

Mr. Brande was slowly perusing his niece's letter; but it did not appeal to him,—it had a cringing, fawning smack. Bright-eyed, impetuous Honor could never have penned such an epistle.

“There is a letter on the ground that you have not seen, Mrs. Brande,” said Mark Jervis, as he picked it up.

“So there is, I declare; it is from Mrs. Primrose. I'm sure she wants me to see about getting her house aired. She is rather late up this season.” Mrs. Brande ran her eyes over the paper, and gave vent to an expression of genuine dismay.

“What is the matter?” enquired her husband, quickly.

“She cannot get away for ten days, and she is afraid to keep the child down there any longer, the heat is so awful. She wants me to take her.”

“Oh, Lord!” ejaculated Mr. Brande. “We would sooner take anything—short of small-pox. Wire at once, ‘no room here.’ There are telegraph forms on my writing-table.”

“Too late,” groaned Mrs. Brande; “she has sent her off. ‘Trusting,’ quoting the letter, ‘to my well-known kindness and good-nature!’ I'm a great deal too good-natured, that's what I am,” said Mrs. Brande, with

unusual irritation. "The child and Ayah are actually at the station now, and will be here the day after to-morrow."

"Then I shall clear out if I can possibly manage it," said her husband, emphatically.

"What is there about this child, Uncle Pel, that throws you and Aunt Sara into such a panic?"

"Panic! I thank thee, niece, for teaching me that word. Yes, the very word,—panic. Oh, I forgot you and Jervis here are new-comers; but most of the North-West have seen, or heard of, or suffered from 'Sweet Primrose.'"

"Sweet! What a name! A play on words, I suppose," said Honor.

"And a gross misfit," growled Mr. Brande.

"But give us a few more particulars, sir," urged Mark.

"Prepare us,—put us on our guard."

"She is six years of age, an only child, '*cela va sans dire*,' extremely pretty, and graceful, and intelligent."

"Ah, I believe I shall like her," said the young man, with an appreciative nod. "I am prepared to be her champion. I'm rather fond of children, especially pretty little girls."

"She is as sharp as a surgical needle. Active, greedy, restless, prying, with a marvellous memory for the conversations of her elders and an extraordinary facility in relating them! The things that child has said, with the air of a little innocent saint,—the secrets she has divulged to a whole room,—the malapropos questions she has put—"

"Pelham," interrupted his wife, sternly, "if you are going to repeat any of them, please wait until Honor and I have left the verandah. The child is innocent enough," she explained to Mark, "but mischievous, and she delights in seeing her elders look miserable. Oh, dear me! dear me! I wish the next ten days were over."

Ben can't abide her, and no wonder: she dropped hot wax on his nose. And last time I had her here she tried on every one of my best caps and bonnets, and threw them all over the place. But that was not the worst. At breakfast, one morning, she heard Mr. Skinner telling some story of a horse he had bought, which turned out to be a screw, and she clapped her hands in great glee and screamed,—

"I know what that is! I heard mother say that you were an awful screw.' I thought I should have had a fit, and Mr. Skinner has never put a foot inside this house from that day."

CHAPTER XXV.

"SWEET PRIMROSE JUSTIFIES HER REPUTATION."

Two days after this conversation, Sweet Primrose was kicking her long legs in Bookwood verandah as she lay flat on the matting absorbed in a picture-book. A picture-book, no matter how quaint, novel, or voluminous, never lasted this young lady for more than five minutes, as Mrs. Brande well knew. She would toss it scornfully aside, and once more begin to wander to and fro with her wearisome little parrot cry of, "Amuse me, amuse me!"

At present she was on her good behaviour. She had taken an immense fancy to Mark, and she was surprisingly polite to Honor; and as she was undoubtedly a most lovely child, with delicate features, wistful violet eyes, and hair like spun silk, the young people were inclined to make much of her, and to believe that Mr. and Mrs. Brande were a prejudiced elderly pair, who did not know how to take the right way with children, and this particular child was disposed to favour them with a great deal of her society, and they enjoyed it.

She accompanied them about the garden, generally walking between them, tightly holding their hands. She spent a considerable time every morning in Honor's room fingering all her knick-knacks, unfolding her handkerchiefs, upsetting pin-boxes, and watching with undisguised interest how Honor did her hair.

The result of the inspection being that at breakfast she was in a position to announce to the company the following gratifying statement:

"I saw Honor doing her hair; it's long and real, like mine!"—with a conceited toss of her blonde locks,—
"down to here," indicating the length on her own small person. "She does not put on bits like mamma. Mamma's fringe is all pinned on with long pieces that fasten it at the side like this," demonstrating their situation with tiny tell-tale fingers, "or like you," turning to Mrs. Brande. "I saw your plait."

"Well, I hope you admired it," rejoined the lady with somewhat staggering *sang-froid*. "It grew on my own head once." And Sweet, finding that the topic was not a painful one, ceased to pursue it.

She was fond of sitting on Mark's knee with her arm closely locked round his neck, her cheek pressed against his, looking at pictures or listening to stories; indeed, he seemed, as Mrs. Brande remarked, to have hypnotised her! Ben still distrusted the child; so did Ben's grandpapa and grandmamma. But every one else appeared to think that Sweet Primrose was now quite a pattern,—a reformed character! She went down to the band exquisitely dressed in fluffed-out petticoats and fine silk stockings, in charge of her fat jewelled Ayah; there she secretly administered pinches right and left to other children, and rudely criticised their clothes. She strolled into the ladies' room, ostensibly to look at the picture-papers, and she was among her elders so quiet, so piano, such a dainty founced-out little mortal, that old acquaint-

ances could hardly realise that *this* was their own original and most disagreeable "Sweet."

It was Mrs. Brande's birthday, and Mrs. Brande's birthday had not been forgotten by her friends. There were cards, letters, and little presents from some of the "boys," a lovely sachet from Honor (secretly manufactured as a surprise), bouquets, an exquisite silver lamp from Mark Jervis, which she remarked to Honor "must have cost the poor boy a frightful sum!" last, not least, a silver photograph frame "with Ben's respects."

Mrs. Brande's face was radiant. She went straight up to Mark with her presents in her hands.

"It was too bad of you to buy me such a grand present, and just what I was longing for; and Ben, that was your idea too. Do you know that I have a great mind to give you a kiss," she said, threateningly.

Sweet, who was playing with her porridge, stiffened with expectation and awaited further developments with a pair of enormous eyes.

But Mrs. Brande did not carry out her menace. No; she merely said, "You are only a boy, and I am an old lady. How old are you, by the way,—eh? I must make a note of your birthday."

"I was twenty-six last April."

"Twenty-six! Why, you don't look it by five years," sitting down before the teapot and a pile of letters and little parcels which lay beside her plate.

"Polham always gives me diamonds," she went on; "but I have plenty, and in case you might suppose he had forgotten me this time, he has given me a large cheque for the new Orphanage, so I have done splendidly."

"Did you get any chocolates?" asked Sweet, anxiously.

"No, my dear; but I'll buy a box for you after breakfast."

"And is this really your birthday?"

"Yea,—why? Doesn't it look like it?" triumphantly.

"I thought it was only ladies who had birthdays," remarked this charming little guest with a severe air, "and Mrs. Dashwood says you are not a lady."

"Well, not by birth, my dear,—though I dare say I am as well born as she is; and, anyway, I take the *pas* of her in all society."

"Whose *pa*?" was the sternly put question.

As Mark and Honor greeted this query with a burst of laughter, the mite looked excessively pleased with herself.

"You will soon find her quite in her best form," muttered Mr. Brande from behind the *Pioneer*. Then added, in French, "She has been pretty good for a week, and that's her very longest interval. I saw her down at the fowl-house before breakfast, Honor, with your smart white silk parasol."

"Mamma always talks just as you do when she is talking about me, or about anything she does not want me to know," cried Sweet, vivaciously. "I've done my breakfast," slipping off her chair, "and I'm going down to see the Syces children. Oh, won't I pull their hair!" And she darted away.

Sweet was possessed of a demon of unrest that same morning. Nothing pleased her for more than two minutes, and her indolent Ayah calmly left the task of entertaining her to others. Little Miss Primrose never played games, or dressed dolls, or made shops; indeed, Sweet's tastes were far too advanced for these tame delights: they had palled years previously. It afforded her far keener pleasure to harry her elders, and to rule her fellow house-mates with a scourge.

She wandered aimlessly about with her piteous shrill cry of "Amuse me, amuse me! oh, will no one amuse me!" She had tired of Honor's hats and new dresses, of chocolates, of Mark's stories. Her irritating and

monotonous appeal had become as maddening as the constant slamming of a door.

"Look here, Sweet; I have a grand idea," said Mark, at last. "Would you like me to draw your picture?"

"And colour it?" she asked, judiciously.

"Yes; and put in your blue sash and all."

"And my necklace?"

"Certainly,—your necklace too, if you please."

"Then do—do—do it this instant minute!"

"You must wait till I get my drawing things and paints, and you will have to sit quite, quite still for a whole hour. If you cannot do that there will only be an *ugly* picture. Do you understand? My easel and things are at Haddon Hall. I must send for them; so if you like to go and smarten yourself up you can."

He had scarcely ceased to speak ere the vain little creature strutted straight off to her own room, loudly calling for her Ayah in imperious Hindustani.

Mrs. Brande could hardly believe her eyes when an hour later she came into the verandah in some trepidation to see what made Sweet so quiet, and discovered the "little blister," as she mentally called her, seated demurely on a chair, as rigid and motionless as a statue.

"See, I'm having my picture took," she chirped out. "But I must not move. Please look how far he has got," nodding towards Mark, who was painting away steadily, though rather embarrassed by the loss of the use of his left arm.

Mrs. Brande and Honor went over to examine the portrait, expecting to see a feeble little outline,—something done just for good nature and to keep the child quiet. But they almost started as their eyes fell on a roughly sketched-in head,—the living, breathing face of Sweet, looking at them from the canvas, with her best, in short, her "angel" expression.

1. The first line of the document is a horizontal line.

"Well, I never! Why, you are a regular artist!" gasped Mrs. Brande at last.

"A very irregular one," he answered, with a laugh. "I have not attempted a portrait for more than a year. I have, like every one who comes up and can hold a brush or pencil, attempted the snows. But my snows are like a row of blobs of cotton wool. I cannot do landscapes, though I am pretty good at faces and animals."

"I should rather think you *were*," said Mrs. Brande, emphatically.

"Is it pretty?" called out the model. "Is it pretty, like me?"

"Who said you were pretty?" demanded Mrs. Brande.

"Every one says, 'Oh, what a pretty little girl!'"

"It is much too nice for you, I can tell you that." To Mark, "It is wonderful. Why, you could make your fortune as a portrait painter!"

"So I have been told,—perhaps because there is no chance of my ever putting the advice into practice. I can catch the likeness and make the picture resemble my sitter, but I cannot finish. After a certain point, if I go on, I spoil the whole thing."

"Oh, please," whined a small voice in acute agony, "don't spoil me!"

"No need, you are quite spoiled enough," rejoined the artist with unusual emphasis.

"Why did you never let us know of this talent, Mark? What a pleasure to your friends!" said Mrs. Brande, leaning heavily on his chair. "I wish you would make a little tiny sketch—of—Ben."

"No sooner said than done. I must leave this to dry for to-day, so call up the next victim; I have another block ready. Ben, old man, I am going to hand you down to posterity."

Ben did not make half as good a model as Sweet, probably because he had not one atom of personal vanity.

Every now and then he disturbed his "pose" by dashing at some mocking little devil of a squirrel who peeped through the trellis-work and dared him to do his worst. He dared, and it invariably came to nothing.

How the morning had flown! When "P." appeared at two o'clock his wife rushed at him with two pictures,—a sketch of Sweet and a half worked-in outline of Ben to the life.

"Ben is splendid!" he exclaimed; "the twinkle in his eye, the white spot on his lip, and his Sunday-go-to-meeting expression. Ah! and let me see,—my 'Sweet,' her most angelic and butter-would-not-melt-in-my-mouth look! Beautiful child!" apostrophising her. "I think I can manage to remember *you* without the assistance of a speaking likeness!"

"Uncle Pen, how can you be so horrid?" remonstrated Honor, taking him in to lunch.

Luncheon (tiffin) was an exceedingly merry meal. It is well that we cannot see into the future, for dinner was the most dismal repast that the present tenants had ever discussed under the red-tiled roof of Rookwood.

Mark Jervis had been ten days with the Brandes, and had never found an opportunity yet of opening his heart or telling his secret to Miss Gordon. Now that he was under the same roof, his hopes fell low and his courage ebbed. He believed that she would be extremely indignant when she heard the truth from his own lips that *he* was the millionaire! Moreover, "that diabolical child," as, alas, he had now begun to call her, never left them alone or out of her sight for one second. He was an ardent convert to Mr. and Mrs. Brande's views,—though he kept his conversion strictly to himself.

That same afternoon he found that his opportunity was approaching. Sweet was engaged to a children's party, Mrs. Brande was pledged to attend a mothers' meeting. Mr. Brande, who was busy over some returns, said,—

"Honor, you and Jervis go up the forest road, and I will be after you in a quarter of an hour. No ponies; we will walk and give ourselves a colour and an appetite. You may as well take Ben and give him a run among the monkeya."

Honor and her escort set out,—he with his arm in a sling,—and they walked briskly along the wide sandy carriage road that wound up and up at a very gentle slope among the pines. It was a delicious still afternoon, the aromatic smell of the woods had impregnated the thin hill air and acted on their spirits like champagne.

"Our nephew," alluding to Ben, who was cantering gaily ahead, "seems to be enjoying himself," said Jervis.

"He does; this is his favourite road. That was a happy thought about *his* present!"

"Yes," with a smile; "I'm glad Mrs. Brande was so pleased. Mrs. Sladen helped me with suggestions."

"Poor Mrs. Sladen. She says that only for you she would have been killed the day that Toby Joy sent you both down the khud,—that you put out your arm and saved her, and you won't allow her to say so."

"No, indeed; I certainly will not."

"Colonel Sladen has been winning, and I have great hopes that he may allow her to go home this season."

"I hope he will with all my heart. If I were her I would remain at home for good."

"She has not seen her children for five years, and little things forget so soon."

"Not always," significantly. "Our little friend has a wonderful memory."

"No, no, but ordinary children. Sweet is extraordinary. Colonel Sladen has won ever so much money from Captain Waring, and if it pays her passage, for once gambling will have done *some* good. All the same, I wish he would do something better with his money.

Uncle Pelham says it is such a frightful example to other young men."

"Yes, and he has no luck,—he might just as well draw a cheque and send it to the secretary to distribute among the members, for it is only a loss of time, and would amount to the same thing in the end."

"Minus the delightful excitement of gambling; you forget *that*! It seems too bad to squander money in that way, when there is such poverty and misery everywhere. Even a few pounds can do wonders and change people's lives altogether. Sometimes it appears to me that money is in wrong hands, and its owners don't recognise their responsibilities."

"A great fortune is a great responsibility," remarked her companion. "It is so hard to know when to give and when not to give; I think people with moderate incomes have much the best of it."

"It is a capital joke, if any one could but hear us, deploring the drawbacks of wealth, you and I, the two poor relations. At least I speak for myself," with a merry smile.

"And I must speak for myself; I have long wished to tell you something, Miss Gordon. I have rather shirked doing it, because I'm afraid you will be vexed, but——"

The sudden snapping of a twig on the edge of the bank overhanging the road caused him to glance up. There stood a large leopard in the act of springing; like a flash it alighted just a yard behind them and then bounded back with poor Ben in its mouth. It all was the work of two seconds.

"Oh, Ben! poor Ben!" shrieked Honor, frantically. "Let us save him! we must save him!"

Jervis snatched the alpenstock from her hand and ran up the bank. Leopards are notorious cowards; the brute halted one instant, dropped his prey, and sprang lightly away among the undergrowth.

But, alas, poor Ben was stone dead. Three minutes ago he had been full of life, now a bite in his throat had ended his happy existence; there he lay with his eyes wide open, fixed in an expression of frozen horror. His death was on him ere he knew it; he was dead as he was carried off the road.

As he lay limp across Honor's lap, her tears trickled slowly and dropped on his still warm body.

"Aunt Sara, who was to tell her? Oh, what an ending to her birthday! And she had often dreaded this end for Ben, almost as if it was a presentiment, and had always been so urgent to have him home by sundown." There was scarcely a house in Shirani that had not paid toll to the "lugger buggas," as the natives call them, who were specially keen about dogs, short-haired dogs, and who hung about paths and cook-houses in their vicinity after dark. But this murder had been done in broad daylight, long ere it was even dusk.

"Come, Miss Gordon," said her escort, "you really must not take on like this; you have only known him three months, and——"

"Don't say he was only a dog!" she interrupted, indignantly.

"Well, then, I won't, and I feel most awfully out up myself. Yea," in answer to her upward glance, "I am indeed. It is something to know that his end was instantaneous; he scarcely suffered at all."

"And how is this to be broken to them?"

"Mr. Brande is coming after us. I will go and tell him if you will wait here. No," on second thoughts, "that would never do, to leave you alone and that brute in the wood; not that I believe he would face a human being. Ah, here comes your uncle."

The tragedy was gradually broken to Mrs. Brande, and deep was her grief when her little dead dog was brought in and laid at her feet. All the native house-

hold mourned (whether sincerely or from their servile instincts who shall say?). The only one who did not mourn was Sweet, who candidly exclaimed, as she cut a happy caper,—

"Nasty, ugly dog! I am so glad he is dead!"

Fortunately, Mrs. Brande did not hear her, or she would probably have sent her straight out of the house to test the comforts of the dāk-bungalow.

Poor Mrs. Brande had cried so much that she was not fit to be seen; she did not appear at dinner. Next morning Ben's unfinished sketch called forth another flood of tears, and she was not presentable all forenoon.

Meanwhile, Sweet posed for her portrait and chatted incessantly. She had been to a large party, and no other little girl had worn gold bangles or pink garters with satin rosettes. So she had frankly assured her audience, Mark and Honor. The latter was surrounded by quite a stack of books and intent on solving an acrostic in the *World*.

"The tea was pretty good," continued Sweet, affably. "I got nine crackers and a fan, and a little china doll quite naked, but the sweets were not Peliti's, only bazaar made, I am sure. Percy Holmes tried to kiss me, and I scratched his face and he cried. Such a Molly! I shall always call him Baby Holmes!"

Thus she babbled on garrulously with her infantile gossip. Suddenly she seemed struck by an important thought, and gravely asked, with a widening of her big violet eyes,—

"What does detrimental mean,—de-tri-men-tal?" pronouncing the word as if she had got it by heart.

"You had better ask Miss Gordon," replied Mark. "Miss Gordon, there is a dictionary at your hand."

"Oh, what does it matter?" exclaimed Honor, who was beginning to be rather distrustful of Sweet's seemingly artless questions.

"Find out! find out!" cried the imp, swinging her legs impatiently to and fro. "I want to know, and I am sitting very nicely, am I not?"

Mark made a sign to Miss Gordon to humour her, adding, "I never saw such a small person for picking up big words."

"Here it is," said Honor at length, "and much good may it do you!" reading out,—

"Detrimental,—injurious, hurtful, prejudiced."

"That's what Mrs. Kane said *he* was," pointing a gleeful finger at the young man. "A shocking detrimental, and that Mrs. Brande was a fool to have him here."

"Sweet! How dare you repeat such things!" cried Honor, with blazing cheeks. "You know it is very wrong. What a naughty little girl you are!"

"But she *said* it," persisted Sweet, "and she is grown up."

"She was joking, of course; grown people often joke."

"She said a great deal; she said that——"

"Hus-a-sh. We don't want to hear tales," breathlessly interrupted Honor.

"She said," screamed a piping, triumphant voice, high above the hus-a-sh, "he was in love with you!"

"Now," cried Honor, her passion having risen beyond all control as she surveyed the pert self-complacent little model (she dared not look at Mark Jervis), "I told you not to repeat stories. I have told you that over and over again, and yet you delight in doing it because it annoys people, and you do it with impunity. No one has ever punished you, but *I* shall punish you."

And before Mark guessed at what was about to happen, Miss Gordon—actively precipitate in her resentment—had snatched the picture from the easel before him and torn it into four pieces!

"There!" she cried, breathlessly, "you can get off that chair at once, Sweet. Mr. Jervis has done with you."

Sweet opened her great violet eyes and gazed in incredulous amazement. Never had she been so served! She had always hitherto made people angry, uncomfortable, or shocked, and gone scathless, and had invariably enjoyed what is known in sporting circles as a "walk over."

Never had she seen such an angry young lady. How red her cheeks were! how brightly her eyes glittered! Then Sweet's gaze fastened on her own picture, her mouth opened wide, and gave vent to an ear-splitting yell as she tumbled off her chair like a canary off its perch, and lay on the verandah kicking and screaming.

"After all," said Jervis, with an air of humble deprecation, "you need not have been so angry with the poor little beggar; she only spoke the truth."

(That he was a detrimental, or that he was in love with her, which?)

Attracted by vociferous shrieks, Mr. and Mrs. Brande rushed upon the scene from opposite doors. The languid Ayah also appeared, and raised up her sobbing charge, who only now and then varied her sobs by a shrill squeal of fury.

"What is it?" cried Mr. Brande, eagerly appealing to Honor and Mark. "I thought you were putting her to torture at *last*!"

"What is it, dearie? What is it? Tell me!" pleaded Mrs. Brande. "Come to me, lovey, and tell me all about it, doatio. There now, there now," making dabs with her handkerchief at the child's eyes.

"That," suddenly stiffening herself in the Ayah's arms and pointing a trembling finger at the guilty party,— "that pig girl tore up my pretty, pretty picture because I told her Mrs. Kane said that Mark was in love with her. She *did* say it at the tea to Mrs. King, and that beast of a girl has torn my picture, and I'll tell my

mamma, I will, I will; and Mrs. Kane did say it, and Mrs. King——"

"For heaven's sake, take her away!" shouted Mr. Brande, excitedly.

And Sweet was promptly carried off, kicking desperately, and still shrieking out, "She did say it! She did, she did, she did!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RESULT OF PLAYING HOME, SWEET HOME.

It may appear in a ludicrous light to most people, but it was nevertheless a solemn fact that Mrs. Brande fretted so dreadfully after her dog that her medical adviser (Dr. Lloyd) suggested to her husband "a few days' change, just to get her mind off it! You frequently go for a week's trip among the hills; go now."

Such an excursion did not mean the wild, trackless jungle, but a country intersected by good roads and bridle-paths, dotted at reasonable intervals by comfortable rest-houses. Neither the sympathy of her friends nor a neat little grave and headstone inscribed "Ben" had had the smallest effect in taking the keen edge off the bereaved lady's grief, and she would have nothing whatever to say to a sweet little pup which Mark had procured for her, but indignantly hustled it out to the Ayah's go-down. There was nothing for it but the prescribed expedition. Mrs. Sladen was to have been one of the party, but failed (as usual) to obtain leave from home. Mr. Jervis would gladly have joined them, but he dared not absent himself from Shirani in case the expected summons might arrive whilst he was away. The long marches would have afforded capital opportuni-

ties for *tête-à-têtes* with Miss Gordon; he would have told her *all* as he rode by her side; the only difficulty was that he was now rather doubtful as to whether Miss Gordon would be interested in his confidences. Her indignation when Sweet had blurted out the most sacred secret of his soul had opened his eyes, and when he had ventured to add that the child had spoken the *truth*, Miss Gordon had simply withered him; yea, Waring was right when he had spoken of her haughty eyes. Her anger had eventually passed over like a short thunder-storm, and she had meekly apologised for her outbreak, but without the smallest or faintest reference to his remark, as possibly being beneath notice.

"You have seen me in a rage before," she had declared; "not that *that* is any excuse for me, but rather the reverse. Of course I had no business to touch your drawing, and I am exceedingly sorry that I gave way to such a mad impulse. I wanted to give that wretched child a lesson, and I caught at the first weapon that I thought would punish her. I don't often behave in such a shameful and unladylike way, I do assure you."

And he assured himself that he might keep his real identity and his fine prospects locked forever in his breast as far as she was concerned. The two days occupied in preparing for the march he spent in finishing Ben's portrait. He held himself a good deal aloof; he seemed silent and out of spirits, and Mrs. Brande confided to her husband that she was sure his wrist was hurting him: he had been making too free with it, and she gave him many instructions on the subject ere they parted, he to return to Haddon Hall and she to lead the way out of the station. He was to go up every day and have a look at Rookwood, cast his eye over the poultry and ponies, and see that the ferns were properly watered; in other words, Mr. Jervis was left as caretaker in charge, a token of unexampled confidence.

What a long time it seemed since he had come to Shirani! he thought, as he trotted up the cart-road after having put his friends well on their journey. The chances were that his father would never send for him, still he would remain at his post until October and then go home. He would not be sorry to see Uncle Dan once more, to tell him yarns and to unpack his collection of presents, to look round the clubs and hear all that had been going on during the season, and to try his young hunters out cubbing.

Yes, it was all very well to have modest ideas, but the pinch of poverty was another affair, and he and poverty were gradually establishing quite a bowing acquaintance. He was dunned for joint bills, unpleasant joint bills, small accounts that made him feel small to think that they had been unpaid, shoeing bills, gram bills, gymtana subscriptions, wood and charcoal, and even milk bills. He would find it a tight fit to pay off old scores and leave sufficient money for their passage. He saw his own private funds shrinking daily, nevertheless he was resolved not to apply to his uncle for money, nor to exceed his draft of six hundred pounds. Why should his uncle pay for his short-sighted folly? he had told him to keep the money in his own name, and nevertheless he had given Clarence a free hand. But then in his wildest moments he had never supposed that the purse that supplied Captain Waring's wants, wishes, weaknesses, must be practically bottomless. "What a fool I have been!" he said to himself. "I have lived like an anchorite and Waring like a prince; he has squandered every penny of my money, and turns about and blames me for leading him into temptation."

Mrs. Brande in her comfortable Missouri dandy, Mr. Brande and Honor riding in advance, wound along the steep sides of forests, over passes, down ravines, travelling all the time through exquisite scenery in the clear

hill air, where everything looks fresh, and the outlines of the trees and mountains are sharply defined against a cloudless sky. They halted each night at a different bungalow, marching about fifteen miles a day, and arriving at their halting-place early in the afternoon. On the third day they came to a small out-of-the-way forest hut which contained but a verandah and three rooms, and two of these were already occupied.

Such a state of affairs was unparalleled. The earlier arrivals were two engineers on survey and a lady travelling alone. Mr. Brande looked excessively blank; he would have to rig up some kind of shelter in the verandah, for they had not brought tents, and whilst he was conferring with Nuddoo, Honor strolled away with her violin. She liked to play in solitary places, where all kinds of musical vagaries and occasionally her own compositions were unheard by mortal ears.

She climbed the long, sloping hill at the back of the bungalow and sat down below a great clump of bamboos and elephant grass, and began to play soft, gentle music that seemed to have exquisite words.

She played away, dreamily, for quite three-quarters of an hour, now stopping to fill her eyes with the landscape, the rolling hills, the glitter of the sunset on a distant deep-set mountain tarn, the faint far-away line of the plains.

At length it was time to be going, one star was out and a thin, silver moon had sailed into the sky. She played as a final "Home, Sweet Home," a tribute to Merry Meetings and its inmates. As the last note died away her trained and sensitive ear caught a faint sound in the tall grass and jungle behind her. Was it the sound of a human sigh? She started and glanced round, just in time to see a thin hand withdrawn and the grass quiver all over, as something, somebody, crept stealthily away. Every scrap of colour had sunk from Honor's face as

Honor hastened to undress and get into bed as noiselessly as possible. She was tired, she had been in the open air all day, and presently she fell sound, sound asleep. She was unexpectedly awoke by a light and a feeling that some one was bending over her. In a second she realised that a stranger, a woman, was standing beside her bed, who stammered in a curiously, deliberate whisper, "Oh! I beg your pardon."

"Then," said the girl, instantly sitting up and rubbing her eyes, "you are English."

It was one of her wildest shots. She had been dreaming of a Begum with rings in her nose. The woman beside her made no other reply than by bursting into loud hysterical tears, suddenly kneeling down beside the bed and burying her face in her hands.

"Oh, tell me!" said the girl, laying an impulsive grasp on her heaving shoulder. "What is your trouble?"

"Great, great,—trouble—such—as you have never dreamt of," gasped the figure. "I was sitting in the wood and I heard you play. When you played a tune I have not heard for more than thirty years something in my heart melted. I felt that I must see you,—for though I had never seen you face to face, I loved you! I asked you to share my room that I might gaze at you secretly and carry away the remembrance of your features in my heart; but," now raising her head and looking piteously at Honor, "you awoke and discovered me——"

She was an old woman, to Honor's surprise; at least her hair was snow white, her eyes black and keen as a falcon's; her face was thin and haggard, her features were worn, but they were perfect in form and outline. This white-haired woman kneeling beside Honor, who was kissing her hands with hasty, feverish kisses, must once have been extraordinarily handsome,—nay, she was handsome now.

"I watched you asleep," she continued, speaking in

a sort of husky whisper. "I have not looked on the face of an innocent English girl for thirty-five years. I was once like you. Your music softened my stony heart, and I felt that I must see you, aye, and perhaps speak to you, once—dear God, before I die!"

"But what is your trouble?" urged Honor, squeezing the thin hand which held hers; "what has happened? who are you?"

"Aye, who am I, that is the question, a question that will never be answered. For its own works lieth every soul in pledge; my soul is pledged to silence. You have heard," dropping her voice to a whisper that seemed to chill like an icy blast, "of—the—mutiny—ladies?"

"Yes, poor souls; and proud I am of my country-women."

"I doubt if you would be proud of me. You speak of those who stood up, aye, as I have seen them, and offered themselves to the sword; those who were butchered and slaughtered like oxen; I speak of—of—of—others—how can I tell this child?—who were carried away and lost forever in native life. I," looking steadily into the girl's eyes,—"I am one of those. Lost honour, lost life, lost soul! God help me!"

A dead silence, broken only by the angry sputtering of the lamp, and then she added, in a strange, harsh voice,—

"Well, I am waiting for you to spit upon me!"

"Why should I?" murmured Honor, in a whisper.

"Listen. I will put out the light and sit here on the ground, and you shall learn my story."

In another second the room was in utter darkness. Darkness appeared to give the stranger confidence, for she raised her voice a key, and Honor could hear every syllable distinctly.

"Thirty-four years ago I was not more than your age, but I had been married a year. We were very happy,

my husband and I; he was an officer in no matter what corps. The mutiny broke out, but we never dreamt that it would touch us. Oh, no, not *our* station. That was the way with us all. One Sunday we were all at church. I remember well, we were in the middle of the Litany, praying to be delivered from battle, murder, and from sudden death, when a great noise of shouting and firing began outside, and people rushed too late to close the doors and some were cut down,—ah, I see them now!”—Honor felt her shudder,—“and many others and myself escaped into the belfry and our husbands held the stairs. They kept the wretches at bay so long that they were out of patience, and after setting fire to the church, rushed off to the cantonments and the treasury, and then we all came down, and found our carriages and ponies and Syces just waiting, most of them, as usual, where we had left them. We got in and drove away at a gallop to a neighbouring rajah to ask for his protection. Many of the men, including my husband, remained behind to try and collect some troops and to save the arsenal and treasury. The rajah lived fifteen miles from our station,—we knew him well,—he came to all our sports and dances and races; fifty of us sought his protection, but he pretended he was afraid to shelter us, and he turned us all out the following day.

“We drove on,—oh such a melancholy cavalcade!—hoping to reach another station in safety; but, alas, ere we had gone five miles we met two native regiments who had mutinied,—met them face to face. We were ordered out in turn just as we drove up, and as each man or woman or child alighted, unarmed and quite defenceless, they were shot or cut down. Oh, the road,—I shall never forget it,—that red, red road between two crops of sugar-cane! Miss Miller,—how brave she looked! just like what one pictures a martyr,—she quietly stepped out and took off her hat, and never uttered word or cry as she faced her horrible death.

Mrs. Earl and her two little children, and poor young Clarke, who had been wounded in the church. I was among the last; I had fainted, and they thought I was dead, I believe, and threw me into a ditch. Presently I crawled out and crept into the sugar-cane, but a sowar discovered me. He saw my white dress, and he came with a bloody upraised tulwar, but something stopped his arm,—my beauty, I suppose! I was the belle of the station,—and he offered me my life, and I took it. Oh,” and she sobbed hysterically, “remember that I was but twenty; I had seen the dead! Oh, *don’t* think so hardly of me as I think of myself! He came at sundown, and brought me a native woman’s dark cloth to throw over my dress, and when the stars came out he swung me up on the crupper of his troop horse, and I rode behind him into Lucknow. In Lucknow we went afoot to escape notice, and in a crowd I eluded him, and turning down a narrow lane fled. I stood inside a door-way as he ran by, and I breathed freely; but, alas, an old man suddenly opened the postern door, stared hard at me—a Feringhee—on his very threshold, and drew me within. Of what avail to cry out! I was in a veritable den of lions.

“The old man kept me concealed, dressed me in native clothes, called me his kinswoman, and gave me to his son as a wife,—a half-witted, feeble creature, who died, and I was left a widow, a native widow! Oh, I know native life! The fierce tyranny of the old women, of the old mother-in-law, their tongues, their spite, their pitiless cruelty. How many vengeancees were wreaked on me! In those days I was stupefied and dull, crazy. No, I had no feeling; I was in the midst of a strange people; those of my own I never saw; no, not when Lucknow was captured; the very news of its fall took three years to reach my ears. I never crossed that fatal postern; I was, as my people believed, in my grave.

“My mother-in-law died at last, and then the old man,

who had ever been my friend, relaxed. I had more liberty; my wits seemed to revive; I spoke Hindustani as a native; I went forth as a Mahomedan woman, veiled. Little did the Bazar folk guess that a Mem Sahib was among them. They believed that I was a Persian,—Persian women are very fair,—only one old woman and her daughter knew the truth. Now and then they smuggled me an English paper or a book, or otherwise I must have forgotten my own tongue. I lived this life for fifteen years, and then my father-in-law, Naim Khan, died; he had no near kin and he was rich, and left me all his money.

"I came away with the two servants and an old man. I remembered Shirani, and I found a little hut in the hills where I live. These hills are to me heaven, as the plains were hell. Think—no, do *not* think—of the stifling life in a tiny courtyard in the densest city quarter, the putrid water, the flies, the atmosphere! I *ought* to have died long ago, but it is those who are good and beloved who die. Even death scorned me! I have a considerable income, and once a year I am obliged to appear and draw it in person. I am returning from a short journey now, and this is the first time I have ever met a soul; this lonely little bungalow is generally quite empty."

"Where do you live?" asked Honor, eagerly.

"In these hills, miles away. I have my books, flowers, poultry, and the poor. I work among the lepers."

"Alone?"

"Yes, forever alone; and my story is for your ear alone."

"And your own people?"

"Believe me dead, and so I am. Did I not die thirty-four years ago? Is there not a very handsome window to my memory in the church where we were first attacked? I saw a description of it in the paper,—the beloved wife

of so and so, aged twenty years. My husband is married."

"Married!" repeated the girl in a startled voice.

"Why not? His family is growing up; he has a son in the service; his eldest girl is twenty. She is called after his first wife. His first wife, poor young thing, was killed in the mutiny, massacred on the Bhogulpore road. Was it not sad?" she added, in a hard, motionless voice.

"Very, very sad," said Honor, in a totally different tone.

"I have no name, no people, no friend."

"You will let me be your friend," pressing her hand sympathetically.

"What is your name, my child?"

"Honor Gordon."

"Honor; a fine name. You would have laid down your life; I saw it in your eyes. Alas, I never was brave; I never could bear pain; life was sweet; any life, not death; anything but a sharp, horrible, violent death. Oh, if death was but a painless sleeping out of life, how many of us would leave it!"

"And what is your name?" enquired the girl in her turn.

"Nussiband."

"But your *real* name? Will you not tell me?"

"I have forgotten it almost. It shall never be known now, not even when I am dead. People know me as the Persian woman who lives near Howal Ghaut."

"Let me do something for you; oh, you will, you must!"

"What could you do, my dear?" she asked in a hopeless tone.

"You will allow me to write to you. Let me go and see you; permit me to brighten your life in some way."

"Impossible. It has done me good to have seen you;

I have poured my story once before I die into the ear of a fellow-countrywoman. May you ever be happy and blessed. Give me some little token, not to remember you by, but to keep, because it was yours."

"What can I give you?" thinking with regret of her few trinkets that were elsewhere.

"A little carnelian ring I noticed on your finger."

Honor pulled it off. She felt a long, fervent kiss pressed upon her hand.

Then she said, "You will give me leave to write to you and send you books? You must. I will take no refusal. But we can talk about that in the morning, can we not?"

There was no answer beyond an ardent kiss upon her hand and a profound sigh.

* * * * *

In the very early dawn Honor awoke and sat up, and looked about her eagerly.

The other charpoy was bare and empty. She jumped out of bed and nearly upset her Ayah, entering behind the door chink with her early morning tea.

"Where is the other lady?" she asked, excitedly.

"Oh, that Persian woman; she went when it was as yet dark. Behold her on her journey."

And she pointed to a narrow road at the other side of the valley, up which a dandy with bearers was rapidly passing out of sight.

* * * * *

After this experience, Honor felt that she had suddenly become years older. She looked unusually pale and grave as she joined the Brandes at breakfast.

"Well, dear, and how did you get on?" asked her aunt. "Did she smoke a huka all night?"

"No, auntie."

"Was she very dark and fat, and did she chew betel-nut?"

"No!" rather shortly.

"And is that *all* you have to say?" in a tone of keen disappointment.

"Good gracious, Sara," exclaimed her husband, impatiently, "you don't suppose that they carried on any conversation unless they talked in their sleep."

"And here are your bangles and things, dear," continued her aunt. "But I don't see your little carnelian ring anywhere! I really—it's not worth a penny—but I don't see it."

No, nor was she ever likely to see it again.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"MRS. LANGRISHE PUTS HERSELF OUT TO TAKE SOMEBODY IN."

THE little excursion into the interior lasted ten days. Mr. Brande was fond of thus throwing off the trammels of office and putting many miles of mountain and valley between himself and official letters, telegrams, and scarlet Chuprassis with their detestable tin boxes. He remained away until the last hour of his leave, enjoying leisurely marches, *al fresco* tiffins, and teas in inviting spots, also friendly discussions with the sturdy Paharis, or hill folk. He returned to Shirani as much refreshed by the change as his good lady.

Tea was ready in the verandah when they reached home; everything appeared in apple-pie order, even to the mistress's keen eye, from the snowy-clad Khitmat Gara, the glossy dark green ferns, to the flouted pup, newly washed and beribboned, who was in attendance in the Ayah's arms. In a short time Mrs. Sladen appeared

to welcome the family. She was speedily followed by Mrs. Paul in a rickshaw and Miss Valpy on a smart chestnut pony.

"We have come to hear all your news," said the latter, as she helped herself to a nice little hot cake.

"News! pray where should we get news?" demanded Mrs. Brande, whose spirits had evidently revived.

"Come, tell us what has been going on in Shirani."

"We are all on the *qui vive* for the bachelors' ball: heaps of people are coming to it," said Miss Valpy.

"Bachelors, *I hope*?" put in Mr. Brande, briskly.

"Yes; it is to be on the eighth."

"I hope that our dresses have arrived?" said Honor, anxiously.

"I think I can relieve your mind," rejoined Mrs. Sladen; "there is a large new deal box in the back verandah that looks very like dresses, but poor Mrs. Curtice, the cart that was bringing up her boxes went over the broken bridge into the river-bed, and all her new frocks are in a state of pulp."

"Who is Mrs. Curtice," enquired Honor,—"*a new-comer*?"

"Yes; an elderly, youngerly, bunchy person," responded Miss Valpy. "She reminds me exactly of an old Java sparrow! She would look the same no matter what she wore."

Mr. Brande (the only gentleman present) put up his eye-glass and gazed at the young lady meditatively.

"Any more news?" continued his insatiable wife.

"They say that Captain Waring is engaged to Miss Potter up at Simla. Does that cause you a pang, Honor?"

"Yes; a pang for Miss Potter," she retorted. "I can't endure Captain Waring."

"Oh, why not? Most people are long-suffering with respect to him."

"I hate a man who, when he talks to me, every now and then chucks me metaphorically under the chin."

Mr. Brande now gravely focussed his eye-glass upon his niece.

"I see what you mean, dear. I'm sure, from what I know of you, he never took a second liberty with yours. Sir Gloster has come back."

Here Mrs. Brande showed signs of increased attention.

"He has got snow-blindness; he went to the Glacier."

"Why, it seems only the other day that he went away," observed Mrs. Brande.

"Yes, just after the starvation picnic," supplemented Honor.

"Everything will be dated from *that* now," exclaimed her aunt, irritably. "And is he laid up in Shirani?"

"Yes; Mrs. Langrishe has taken him in to nurse."

"Mrs. Langrishe! She never did such a thing before in all her life," cried Mrs. Brande; "and besides, she has no room."

"Oh she has contrived it; she has given him Major Langrishe's dressing-room and sent him to the club."

"Well, I never!" gasped Mrs. Brande.

"You see," continued Mrs. Paul, laughing at her hostess's face, "the force of your good example."

"Force of example! I call it the force of being a baronet. And have you seen anything of Mark Jervis?"

"Yes, he and some of the Scorpions; Captain Scrope and Mr. Rawson are laying out a paper chase course. I am sure he will be here presently," added Mrs. Sladen. "He is on this ball committee and extremely energetic. Here he is," as Jervis and two officers cantered up to the verandah, somewhat splashed.

"Welcome back," he said, dismounting. "No, no, thanks, I will not come in, at any rate further than the mat. We have been through bogs and rivers and are in a filthy state."

"Never mind; it's only the verandah. Do come in," said Mrs. Brande, recklessly.

"But I mind very much; and besides," with a laugh, "nothing makes a fellow feel so cheap as dirty boots."

"I thought you were accustomed to feeling cheap," said Honor, with a playful allusion to his nickname.

"No," throwing the reins to his Syce and mounting the steps, "I much prefer to be *dear*."

"Dear at any price!" exclaimed Miss Valpy who, instead of chatting with Captain Scrope, was giving her attention to Mr. Jervis.

"Dear at any price," emphatically. "How did you enjoy the interior," turning to Honor.

"It was delightful."

"Any adventures this time? Any buffaloes, Mrs. Brande?"

"No, thank goodness, for I have the same wretches of Jampannia."

"And you, Miss Gordon? Had you no adventures?"

Miss Gordon coloured vividly, and muttered an inaudible reply as she deliberately put the tea caddy over the sugar-bowl. He recalled this little incident long afterwards and then read its meaning. "Here is Scrope waiting for a cup of tea after his hard day," he said, suddenly turning the subject and slapping Captain Scrope on his solid shoulder. "Scrope is wasting to a shadow with work, work, work." He and Captain Scrope were enthusiastic fellow-artists and racket-players.

"Yes, it's a fact; it's nothing but schools, and classes, and drill, and drawing maps; the army is not what it was," remarked Captain Scrope, a round-faced, portly individual with a merry countenance. "We have garrison classes, signalling classes, musketry classes, but the most odious class I have ever attended is the meat class."

I never bargained for all this sort of thing when I came into the service."

"What did you bargain for? What would you like? Do, pray, name it," urged Miss Valpy.

"Well, since you ask me, a nice gentlemanly parade, once a week, would, in my opinion, fulfil all requirements."

"How moderate!" she exclaimed, sarcastically. "Has any one been to see poor Sir Gloster? It must be so dull for him sitting all day with his eyes bandaged."

"Yes, I looked in yesterday; he was cheery and chatty."

"Nonsense! What did he talk about?"

"Well—a—chiefly himself."

"Rather a dry topic," muttered Jervis, *sotto voce*.

Captain Scrope laughed. "He is by no means so dull as you suppose," he rejoined, significantly.

"No; Miss Paske is a sympathetic little creature and has a pleasant voice," observed Miss Valpy, with a satirical tightening of the lips. "By the way, with his chubby cheeks and bandaged eyes, did Sir Gloster not strike you as a grotesque copy of the god Cupid?"

"To quote the immortal Mrs. Gamp, I don't believe there was ever such a person. Do you, Jervis?"

"Mr. Jervis will not agree with you," rejoined Miss Valpy, scrutinizing him critically. What sincere eyes he had! (eyes only for Honor Gordon,) and there was a wonderful amount of dormant force in the curve of that well-formed chin and jaw.

"I am not a coarse heretic like Captain Scrope, but I cannot say that I have ever made his personal acquaintance."

"No?" exclaimed Miss Valpy, with a slightly incredulous glance. "Then I do not think you will have long to wait."

Miss Valpy's sharp eyes and tongue were notorious

all over Shirani. Jervis surveyed her with a look of cool, polite scrutiny, as he answered with a nonchalance impossible to convey,—

"Possibly not; they say everything comes to those who wait."

"And how is Sweet, our own choice particular Sweet?" enquired Mr. Brande, as he laid down his cup and addressed himself to Captain Scrope. "I am languishing for news of the little darling."

"The pretty child still endears herself to every one. All our special skeletons continue to be dragged out into the light of day. Her last feat was to ask Mrs. Turner where her second face was, as Mr. Glover said she had two. I wish some one would take the good little darling home; poor as I am, I would gladly contribute to her passage."

"Talking of sending home," said Mrs. Paul, "our collection for that poor widow and her children is getting on famously; we have nearly two thousand rupees. I must say that Anglo-Indians are most liberal; they *never* turn a deaf ear to a deserving charity."

"It is probably because they are shamed into it by the noble example set them by the natives," remarked Mr. Brande; "a man out here will share his last chupatty and his last pice with his kin. Thanks to the fact that the well-to-do support all their needy relations, we have no poor rates."

"There is one mysteriously charitable person in Shirani," continued Mrs. Paul, "who has repeatedly sent Herbert fifty rupees in notes anonymously; we cannot guess who he is?"

"He? Why should it not be *she*?" enquired Miss Valpy, combatively.

"The writing is in a man's hand, and the notes are stuffed in anyhow; they are extremely welcome, however; always come when most wanted. It is some one who has been here since March."

"No, no, Mrs. Paul, you need not look at me," exclaimed Captain Scrope, with a deprecating gesture; "I am an object of charity myself."

"Have you no idea, have you formed no conjecture?" enquired Mr. Brande, judicially.

"I was thinking that perhaps Sir Gloster—" she began.

"Oh," broke in Miss Valpy, hastily, "I can assure you that he is quite above suspicion; the only thing about him that is *not* large is his heart. It is much more likely to be one of the present company." And her smiling glance roved from Mr. Brande to Honor, from Honor to Mr. Rawson, from Mr. Rawson to Mr. Jervis.

His face was determinedly bent down; he was playing with "Jocko," the friend of dead and gone Ben, who now honoured Rookwood with much of his society, and all she could scrutinize was a head of brown hair and a neat parting. Presently the head was raised; she met his eyes point-blank. Yes, he looked undeniably embarrassed, not to say guilty, as he endeavoured to evade her searching gaze.

"The culprit is Mr. Jervis!" she proclaimed, with an air of calm conviction.

At this announcement there was a shout of ribald laughter, even Mrs. Paul and Mrs. Sladen smiled. Jervis the impecunious, the unassuming, the unpaid travelling companion! why, he went by the name of "the poor relation!" Miss Valpy's shots generally hit some portion of her target, but this one was widely astray. And now conversation turned upon the ensuing ball; decorations were eagerly discussed. Was the dancing-room to be done in pink, or would men wear mess jackets? Had bachelors any distinctive colours, or would the colours of the Shirani Gym-Kana be suitable? Should they select the colours of the most popular bachelor?—this was Mr. Brande's suggestion,—or let each of the fifty

hosts do a small bit of the room to his own fancy? Above this Babel of tongues Jervis's clear voice was heard saying,—

"Take notice, Mr. Brande, that I am going to make a clean sweep of your sofas and arm-chairs; I have also made a note of your new standard lamp; we shall want a cheval glass."

Mrs. Brande beamed; she liked people to borrow her belongings. She would have lent her boy Mark her best pink satin dress and feather head-dress if they would have been of the smallest use to him.

Presently the party broke up, the visitors going away as usual *en masse*.

Miss Valpy was helped on her pony by Mr. Jervis, and as he carefully arranged her foot in the stirrup and gave her the reins, he looked up and their eyes met.

"Thank you very much," was all she said to him. To herself, "Aha, my good young man, I know two of your secrets!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CLUB IS DECORATED.

THE bachelors' ball was to be the dance of the season, and to be done in a style that would set all future competition at defiance, for young Jervis, who was quite a leading light on the committee, had developed unexpectedly magnificent ideas, and ordered things right and left as if the hosts were so many millionaires. Half the supper, at least anything delectable or rare that could venture to undertake a journey, was to be despatched from Pelitis; it appeared to the flattered community that the Indian Empire was being ransacked from Calcutta to Bombay in order to entertain them suitably.

Groups of coolies were toiling up with palms from the hot, low country; a dozen paharis were seeking orchids among the hills; there would be game from the Terai, pâtes and French sweets from the city of palaces, and fish that had executed their last splash in the Bay of Bengal.

Dr. Liloyd nodded his head over his newspaper in the club smoking-room, and remarked that "He supposed it was all as it should be, and truly *fin de siècle*."

To which the Honourable P. Brande from over the edge of the *Calcutta Journal* made answer,—

"Pooh! *Fin de siècle*! Which *siècle*? The Romans, we all know, got their oysters from Cornwall, their caviare from the Caspian; we are only copying them in our so-called modern Capua."

"Yea," responded Dr. Liloyd, with a laugh, "you are right, our luxurious tastes are centuries old, but we have advanced in other ways. Science, for instance; there have been splendid discoveries."

"Most of them infringements of old Chinese and Egyptian patents."

"Do you mean to say that we have not advanced?" demanded the other, deliberately laying down his paper.

"Yea," admitted Mr. Brande. "We have telephones, sewing-machines, bicycles, telegrams; I doubt if they have made us happier than our forefathers. Women have advanced, that is certain. A century ago they were content to live in one place and in a condition of torpid ignorance; they were satisfied that their *métier* was to sit at home and cook and sew. Now, we have changed all *that*. I am reading an article by a woman," tapping the page, "which is amazingly brilliant, lucid, and daring."

"Oh, they are *daring* enough; fools rush in, you know."

"Meaning that we are angels! Thank you, Liloyd," rejoined Mr. Brande, with his dry little laugh. "This

article is quite in your own line. The question is heredity, the burning question of the day and hour. How pitiless it is, this heredity!" he continued, removing his *pince-nez* and sitting well back in his chair. "The only certain and unfailing legacy. Strange how a voice, a trick, a taste, the shape of a feature, or a finger, is handed down, as well as soul-corroding vices, bodily diseases, and deformities. Even animals——"

"Yes, yes," impatiently; "you are going to tell me about the puppy, who points as soon as his eyes are open. I know everything that has been said. Of course we see a great deal of one side of it in our profession."

"I wish that a taste for cooking had been handed down in my wife's family," said Colonel Sladen, suddenly plunging headlong into the conversation. "I tell her that she will poison me yet, and just as effectually as if she were Lucrezia Borgia."

"I'm only surprised that she has not done it long ago," muttered a bystander.

"What's that you were saying about the advance of women, eh, Brande? It's the greatest rot and nonsense, this scribbling and prosing about the quality of the sexes," blustered Colonel Sladen, squaring himself on the hearth-rug. "Women must be kept in their proper places; their sphere is home, the nursery, and kitchen."

Cries of "Oh! Oh!" from several young men, drawn to the scene by a well-known blatant bass voice.

"Yes, I say," encouraged by his audience, "that this growing independence should be nipped, and at once. Women are pushing themselves into our places. Doctors, decorators, members of school boards, senior wranglers, journalists; I don't know *what* they will want next."

"Then I shall be happy to enlighten you," rejoined a clear treble voice from the door-way, and there stood Miss Valpy in her most mannish coat, Tattersall waist-coat and sailor-hat, heading a crowd of other ladies.

"Sorry to disturb you, gentlemen, but we *want* this room."

Colonel Sladen puffed and glared for the moment, positively speechless.

"Permit me to introduce the decorating committee for the ball," continued this bold young person; "the secretary has given the club over to us for two days. We have *carte-blanc* and no time to lose. Each apartment has its own allotted number of workers; this one represents our share," looking round with the complacent eye of a proprietor. "Of course it will have to be thoroughly fumigated and ventilated, but I dare say it won't make a bad tea-room."

"Do you mean to say that we are to turn out," demanded Colonel Sladen, "and to give up our smoking-room for this tomfoolery?"

"There will be no tomfoolery about the *supper*," she retorted, impressively. "I shall really be much obliged if you," looking round and speaking authoritatively, "will all clear out."

"Then I suppose we must fall back on the card-room," growled Colonel Sladen, not displeased at thus securing an early rubber.

"Oh, pray don't!" with a deprecatory gesture; "the card-room is already in hand. It is to be the ladies' cloak-room."

Colonel Sladen restrained himself with great difficulty, as he asked, in a sort of choked voice,—

"And pray, what arrangements have been made for whist?"

"Oh, a tent will be good enough for the card-players," was the contemptuous reply.

"I never heard of such management! I shan't come to this blessed ball."

"Oh, yes, you will," returned Miss Valpy, serenely. She was already at work collecting and piling up news-

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papers. "Think of the prawns and pomphret coming all the way from Bombay, and *how* disappointed they would be not to see you!"

"Ah, and the Agra beauty who is also coming, Miss Glossop, *she* will cut you all out. Ha, ha, ha!" retorted Colonel Sladen, with angry exultation.

"That's what people generally say of a girl they have never seen," rejoined Miss Valpy, coolly sweeping spills off the chimney-piece. "Now I have seen her; there are twenty prettier faces in Shirani."

"Including the face of Miss Valpy?" with ferocious sarcasm.

"It is extremely kind of you to say so," making him a mocking curtsy, "and for once I am quite of your opinion."

Colonel Sladen could not find any appropriate retort beyond some inarticulate emotional noises.

"Fanny," to her sister, "help Mrs. Glover and Mrs. Bell; Abdar," to a servant, "take out all the chairs into the verandah and send in the coolies to lift the table." Thus the smoking-room was stormed, and its lawful tenants scattered abroad by bold, domineering, and unscrupulous women. It was true that every department had been told off; the senior ladies had undertaken the supper-room; there were to be little tables for four,—quite a novel departure,—and on the day of the ball there was scarcely a small table left in any private house in Shirani; the bachelors had borrowed every one, as well as arm-chairs, rugs, and draperies. Rookwood was almost swept and garnished in answer to the demands of Mrs. Brande's "boy" Mark. Mrs. Langrishe, however, had declined to lend one single chair or candlestick: it would have established a precedent. She, however, was good enough to spare her niece, who demonstrated that she could work hard, and decorate, and arrange flowers when she pleased, and was full of clever expe-

dients. She and Toby Joy presided over the arrangement of the long verandah, and divided them with screens, palms, and sofas, hung up lamps, flags, and draperies, and devised numbers of sitting-out nooks with curiously sympathetic details and elaborate care. Their merry bursts of laughter continually penetrated to the ball-room, where a large party, by means of ladders, hammers, and nails, were festooning the walls with miles of bazar muslin. Each department had its own special staff, and they embellished according to their collective taste, and in friendly rivalry with their neighbours.

One gang of workers visited another, in order to offer their opinion and encouragement, and most of the young people enjoyed the decorations every whit as much as the grand result,—the ball itself.

Honor, Mrs. Sladen, and half a dozen men and maidens were posted to the reception-rooms and card-tent, and, strange to say, Honor and Mark Jervis shared the same hammer and bag of nails. Personal history has its epochs, brief seasons, during which life is fuller than usual. Never had the life of these two young people seemed so fruitful of pleasant events as at the present time.

Miss Valpy, the valiant leader of the forlorn hope which stormed the smoking-room, was resting from her labours; lunch for the workers was to be served in an *à fresco* fashion in the back verandah. Meanwhile, she sat reposed in a coign of vantage, an interested and lynx-eyed spectator. She did not rest alone, her companion, Mr. Skeggs, the youth who considered a young man a reward in himself, lolled lazily beside her.

He was a little afraid of Miss Valpy, her sharp tongue occasionally penetrated the rhinoceros hide of his conceit; but somehow the other girls had not encouraged his assistance, which, to tell the truth, had

chiefly consisted in dropping packets of tacks about the floor and lavishing uncomplimentary criticism.

"This ought to be a ripping ball," remarked the youth, complacently. "Awfully well done; some of them are working like niggers." And he grinned like a schoolboy.

"I am glad to see that you have a generous appreciation of *other* people's efforts," rejoined the young lady, sternly.

"Ah—well, yes," stroking his exceedingly faint moustache. "I say, I wonder who will be the belle to-night? Who do you think the prettiest girl in Shirani? I bar the married ladies."

"That is something very novel. Prettiest girl," she repeated, speculatively. "Well, Miss Clover is the most strictly good looking, her features the most correctly in drawing."

"Yes; only she always looks as if she was dressed up to sit, or stand, and be stared at like a wax figure with a label, 'The public are requested not to touch.' You could not imagine her playing a hard set of tennis, or riding to hounds, or braving wet weather."

"No," sarcastically; "I fancy she would '*come off*' badly."

"Miss Paske is the most lively of the lot. She has such a piquant, wicked little face; on the whole, I give her the preference. I like to talk and dance with her, but I funk a *tête-à-tête* or a long walk, for she is just the sort of girl would propose for a fellow like a shot."

"I am sure you need not be the least uneasy, or afraid of putting temptation in her way," said Miss Valpy. "You may enjoy her company with impunity. You would not suit her at all. As you are neither rich, good-looking, clever, nor indeed distinguished for anything but an enormous amount of conceit; and the amusement it affords us is your *only* redeeming quality."

Mr. Skeggs again stroked his little moustache, blinked his white eyelashes fatuously, and giggled like a girl. "Crushed, not to say squashed," he groaned.

"You admire Miss Paske," continued the young lady, scornfully. "Just what I would have expected of you. Now, in my opinion, she is not to be named in the same hour with Honor Gordon. What lovely eyes she has!"

"Yes; Miss Gordon with her fiddle and her figure is hard to beat. As to her eyes, I suppose they have never happened to scorch you? She is too stand off; she is a woman's girl; to tell you the truth, she frightens me."

"Poor, timid, little soldier! No doubt you mean that she never flatters you; and I admit that her honest frankness sometimes takes away my breath. However, she does not terrify other men, for instance," and she paused expressively, "Mr. Jervis."

"No," pursing up his mouth and raising his eyebrows, "I should not say he *shrank* from her. And who do you consider the best-looking man in Shirani, Miss Valpy? Your taste is so cultivated."

"Present company always excepted?" with a mocking glance out of the corner of her eye.

He nodded with a solemn acquiescence.

"Mr. Jervis, of course," was her promptly off-hand opinion.

"Oh, come, I say," expostulated the youth.

"Yes, I will say that he is extremely handsome, not in the big moustache, hooked nose, bold brigand style. He has a noble air; the shape of his head, the cast of his features, the expression of his eyes, embody my idea of a hero."

"A hero!" ejaculated her listener. "Great Scott! a pity he has no way of showing what stuff he is made of beyond beating buffaloes away from old ladies."

"Yes, it is a pity. However, his opportunity may



come yet. It is also a still greater pity that one can never praise one man to another."

"Well," nursing his knee meditatively, "I will admit that Jervis is passable and looks clean bred."

"Thank you, that is very kind of you. Does it not strike you that he is afflicted with an old-fashioned infirmity and is decidedly shy?"

"Shy!" he almost shouted. "Jervis, shy! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he is with ladies."

"Oh, you may call it by whatever name you please; I call it fastidiousness. At any rate, he is not shy with men. No fear. Only last night at the club some cad made a caddish remark, and it was not our hoary Sec who took it up and went for him, or any of the old chaps, but Jervis. By George, he gave him pepper; went alap down his throat, spurs and all. A man's man, you know, and popular. He can sing a good song, make a rattling good speech, and is as active as a cat; you should see him take a run, and jump standing on the billiard-room chimney-piece."

"What! Jervis, my Jervis?" in a tone of affected horror.

"Ahem! Well, I am not so sure of his being *your* Jervis," drawled Mr. Skeggs.

"No, and I am positively certain that he is not, in the sense you mean. I must confess that I should like to study him."

"Would you?" sarcastically. "You will not find him easy to classify, or to fit into any of the usual pigeon-holes; he is a fellow who has a singular gift of self-control,—consumes his own smoke, you know."

"Why, you have been unbending your great mind and studying him yourself. What do you make him out to be?"

"I make him out to be a curiosity, a mixture of an

Arcadian shepherd, a London swell, and the rich young man in the Bible."

"You overwhelm me completely, especially by your last simile. Why the rich young man in the Bible?"

"Because he kept all the commandments."

"Oh!" drawing a long breath, "he must be as wonderful a rarity as the great auk. As for an Arcadian shepherd, I see what you mean. He has got what some one called an out-of-door mind. I have not. I should loathe Arcadia, and green swards, and beribboned crooks, and skipping lambs. To let you into a dead, dead secret, I can never see a lamb without thinking of mint sauce."

"Shame! Shame!" exclaimed Mr. Skeggs, in tragic tones. "Well, Miss Gordon," to Honor, who had approached their nook, "how are you getting on with that grand scheme of mirrors and draperies?"

"Very badly; it would have been finished long ago, only some unprincipled people from the ball-room made raids on me and carried off both my hammers, all my pins, and two of my best Phoolcarries. What do you call that?" appealing for sympathy to Miss Valpy.

"I call it a beastly shame," said Toby Joy, who had joined her, speaking with much virtuous indignation. Toby, who himself had been one of the most audacious robbers.

"I call it Honor among thieves," remarked Jervis, who happened to be passing by.

Miss Valpy looked after him attentively; no, that young man was by no means shy.

"I have made no end of beautiful Kala Juggas," continued Toby, complacently; "there ought to be half a dozen engagements to-night." And he nodded his head and rubbed his hands ecstatically.

"I thought Kala Juggas were not allowed," said Miss Valpy, severely.

"Fine man traps," growled Colonel Sladen, who had

just arrived to offer criticism and obtain lunch. "But girls don't go off as they used to do in my bachelor days. Girls," looking hard at Miss Valpy, "are a drug in the market."

"There is another view that may not have occurred to you," she answered, snatching up the gauntlet thus flung in her face. "They are undoubtedly more difficile than when you were a young man. They may have heard the good old motto, 'Look before you leap.'"

Toby Joy sniggered audibly, and Colonel Sladen, turning savagely upon him, demanded, "What the devil he was laughing at?"

Toby, slightly cowed by the cantonment magistrate's beetling brows and fierce demeanour, blandly answered, with an impudent twinkle, "I was only thinking of something I was told just now: Mrs. Tomkins's English-speaking Bearer announced to her to-day that the goose had four pups."

There was a short of laughter at this startling item of natural history, but Colonel Sladen was still unappeased, and would have pitilessly pressed home his question but for Mr. Skeggs, who cried with great presence of mind,—

"There is Jervis coming back. What is he saying? Ah," with a gesture of delight, "lunch—lunch—lunch, shows he is an alien, or it would have been tiffin—tiffin—tiffin."

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Jervis, making a profound bow, "luncheon awaits you, and Mrs. Lloyd requests me to announce that as you are here to work and not to play, you are only allowed twenty minutes for refreshments."

"Mrs. Lloyd is as bad as an East End sweeter," grumbled Mr. Skeggs, handing Miss Valpy down from their mutual perch.

"You may tell Mrs. Lloyd from me that I won't work

a second over the eight hours," cried Toby; and, offering his arm to Miss Paake, they waltzed across the ball-room "just to try the floor."

"Pray observe," whispered Miss Valpy, as she and her escort seated themselves before a *recherché* cold luncheon, "how your man's man, Mr. Jervis, takes care to secure a place beside a woman's girl. Can you explain that?"

"No," seizing a pair of carvers as he spoke. "Just at present I prefer to explore the contents of this most interesting-looking raised pie."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MARK JERVIS IS UNMASKED.

AT nine o'clock (Indian balls are punctual and early) many lights were to be seen converging in all directions towards the club. The oldest inhabitant scarcely recognised it, it was so completely metamorphosed and turned back to front and upside down. The general effect was dazzling,—Persian carpets, rich draperies, Chinese lanterns, Japanese screens, great palms, abounded in the verandahs, and the ball-room was a blaze of candles, mirrors, and pink muslin. The reception-rooms were blocked up by girls and men busy with programmes and pencils.

Among the girls, no one was so closely besieged as Honor Gordon. She was looking quite lovely in a new white ball-dress, with a diamond star among her dark locks (Uncle Pelham's birthday gift). As for Mrs. Brande, in a black gown, no one had ever seen her attired to such advantage. She was both handsome and dignified in her velvet and diamonds, so different to her

usual parti-coloured "reach me down" costumes. Honor had composed the costume, and it did her credit.

Dancing commenced with all the go and briskness of a bill ball. There was no lazy lounging, men in doorways, and but few wall-flowers; moreover, there were a good many new faces and not a few pretty new frocks. It was going to be a brilliant success.

"I have come to Shirani for six seasons," said Mrs. Brande to Mark (they were sitting out a dance), "and I ought to know the club well. But I give you my word I don't know which room I am in!" (A higher compliment was impossible.) "I have never seen anything like this. Where did you get such grand ideas and such extravagant notions, eh? for I may say that you have managed this ball."

Mark laughed rather constrainedly and made no reply.

"So I hear your cousin is engaged to Miss Potter?" continued the lady.

"So I am told, but not by himself. I rather expected him here to-night."

"Money to money, of course," pursued the matron, discontentedly, "and poverty marries poverty. There is Honor, she is so afraid of what people may think that she is barely civil to any one who has a penny beyond his pay. She is downright stand-off with Sir Gloster and Captain Waring. She will marry a pauper, of course, if she ever marries, and be poor and proud till she goes down to her grave!"

Mark's eyes followed Mrs. Brande's fond glance, and rested on a radiant vision with laughing eyes who was endeavouring to arrange a dispute between two partners. She did not give one the impression of being either poor or proud at present.

Yes, the dance was going off splendidly; the newcomers had all been provided with partners; the refreshments were perfect; there was not too much salt

in the ices or sugar in the cup. The sitting-out arrangements were greatly appreciated, and the excellent band was sober to a man.

One of the strangers had been waltzing with Honor Gordon. He was a brisk young fellow who was going to be something some day, and was seeing the world as a preliminary step. He kept his eye open and carried a note-book, and had run up to Shirani in order to visit his brother and gather statistics and local colour. As they came to a halt, he panted out rather breathlessly,—

"So you have got that fellow Jervis here," nodding to where he was standing exactly opposite. "Jervis the millionaire, as of course you know?"

"Oh, no; it is his cousin, Captain Waring, who goes by that name."

"He certainly was giving that impression at Simla, and was about to be engaged to an heiress on the strength of it, but I put a stop to his game," said the little man, complacently.

"You did! And may I ask why?" regarding him with great astonishment.

"Why? Why should I not expose an impostor?"

"I think we must be at cross-purposes and speaking of different people," said the young lady, rather stiffly.

"I think not; but we can go into that later. Do not let us lose this capital waltz."

When they had taken two more turns round the room they came to a halt, and he suddenly recommenced,—

"Waring has not a penny to bless himself with; nothing but debts. He left the Thutlands a ruined man,—ruined by his own folly."

"And Mr. Jervis?"

"Is the rich young man," he rejoined, impressively.

His companion's incredulity was so plainly depicted on her countenance that he added,—

"Yes, I am quite in earnest. That good-looking young

fellow over there, near the door, who is talking to the girl in pink, I came out with him on board ship last October. He and Waring were going to do a tour,—Waring was a sort of companion and genteel courier. I must say that the young fellow was shamefully mobbed by a lot of snobs, who believed him to be a second Count de Monte Christo. He is really the adopted son of a rich city man, called Pollitt,—Pollitt's Barley, you know," with an explanatory nod, "and he will probably have an immense fortune. He is naturally fond of a quiet life, and seemed to loathe all display or ostentation. Some of the women drove him to sit all day in the smoking-room; they accompanied him fore and aft, and even down to the engine-room. For you see he is a good-looking, gentlemanly boy; none of the poultry grain about him, eh?"

Honor felt as if she was in a dream; her head was giddy. All her ideas about the position of the two cousins were thus suddenly reversed. The news was indeed a revelation.

"I suppose you are *quite* in earnest," she said at last. "But do you know that Captain Waring and Mr. Jervis were here together for weeks, and neither of them ever gave us a hint of your version of the story. It was Captain Waring who made plans, entertained, and lavished money."

"Yes, he was always a first-class hand at *that*! He spent Jervis's money, I do assure you. Jervis lay low for the sake of a quiet life; he has no expensive tastes; but it was all a plant!"

"Then if what you tell me is correct, I think I should call it a shameful hoax," said the young lady, inwardly writhing under the sting of many memories. "It was abominably deceitful of Mr. Jervis."

"Did he ever tell you, or any one, that he was a pauper?"

"No," she admitted reluctantly, "I cannot say that he did; but he acted the part, which was all the same."

"Ah, my dear Miss Gordon, surely you have often heard that appearances are deceitful. Positively, you seem quite annoyed to find that Jervis is a very rich man."

"I am," she rejoined, with indescribable dignity.

"Your state of mind is deliciously unique! How would it have been had he pretended to be rich and turned out to be a beggar?" And he eyed her with irritating steadiness.

"He has taken us all in; it was too bad of him! And if he is so wealthy, what can have detained him at Shirani? He has been here more than two months, and seems to be a fixture. He came in April, and has never left the station for a day. Every one thought it was because he could not *afford* to move about. What does it mean?" And she in her turn surveyed him with searching eyes.

"Ah!" with a laugh, "that riddle is quite beyond me, but I think if you were to apply to some *young lady* in Shirani she might answer the question. Let me suggest his present partner,—the girl in pink."

CHAPTER XXX.

"WHAT PEOPLE SAID."

(Especially what two people said.)

WHEN Mark Jervis came all eagerness to claim his supper dance from Miss Gordon, he saw at once that something was wrong. The merry smile—her greatest charm—he sought in vain upon her face; her expression

was grave, almost stern; she was looking at him as if he was an absolute stranger. *She knew!*

He glanced quickly at her partner, and the mystery was solved. He recollected the man's goggling blue eyes. Where had he seen him? Where? The cordial accost,—

"Hullo, Jervis, came out with you in the 'Victoria'!" promptly dispelled his last hope.

"Yes, so you did," nodding. "Glad to see you here to-night. I suppose you have been globe-trotting like the rest of us."

"You have not done much trotting by all accounts of late."

"No, not much," rather shortly; then to Honor, "This is our waltz."

She gazed at him for an instant in haughty silence, then she answered him, "Yes, but I don't think I shall dance, thank you."

"Oh, do," he urged, as the stranger moved off. "Let us have just one dance. After the dance, the deluge! I see you know. We can have that out later on, but don't let us miss this."

The young lady was passionately fond of dancing,—the floor, the inspiring waltz, a first-rate partner, proved too tempting. "Yes," she said to herself, "just one last waltz and then the deluge." Not one word did she utter when they halted for a few seconds. She kept her face purposely averted and appeared to find an absorbing interest in other people. Then they once more "took the floor;" it appeared to him that she did not dance with her usual buoyancy and light-heartedness. She was as stiff and as rigid as a china doll; apparently she shrank from the support of a millionaire's arm: his embrace was contamination. At last the waltz was over, every one was streaming out, and they naturally followed the crowd. They passed Mrs. Brande, concealing (she

fondly believed) enormous yawns behind a black transparent fan; they passed Mrs. Langrishe issuing bulletins of Sir Gloster's condition to several interested matrons. They went through the verandah side by side, down the steps, and were brought up at last by the rustic railing overlooking the gardens and tennis-court. It was a warm moonlight night, bright as day, and breathlessly still. Dozens of other couples were strolling, standing, or sitting about in the open air; even the chaperons had come forth (a new and in some instances fatal departure) to taste the sweets of a June night in the Himalayas.

Before their eyes rose the long range of snows, India's white crown; beneath them lay the gardens, a jungle of dew-steeped roses, and tall lilies, and great shrubs of heliotrope. Balsac declares that perfume reminds more vividly than words; be that as it may, the slightest perfume of heliotrope invariably recalled that scene and hour to Honor Gordon's memory.

"So I see that it has all come out," began Jervis intrepidly, on the principle that the first blow is half the battle, "and that you know."

"Yes," turning slowly to face him, "and no thanks to you, Mr. Jervis."

"Of course you are awfully angry with me. Nearly" (oh, most unfortunate speech!) "as angry as you were with that imp the day you tore up her picture."

"I am not exactly angry," she replied with tremulous dignity; "why should I be angry? I am merely enlightened. I know who is who now. I dare say you found the little game of deceiving every one most entertaining. You seem to have quite a genius for playing a double part!"

"You are awfully rough on me," he interrupted; "but I suppose I deserve it."

"Now, I have but one character,—such as it is,—so I cannot reciprocate your surprise. I am merely what

you have always seen, a country-bred girl without fortune or prospect of one, with a taste for playing the violin and for speaking out my mind at any cost."

(Yes, there never was any one less at pains to be on the safe side than this young woman.)

"You are disgusted to find that. I am not a poor relation," he ventured to remark.

"Yes. You remember that on this very spot," touching the railings with her fan, "two months ago, Colonel Sladen, with his usual delicate taste, joked pleasantly about the millionaire, your cousin; you laughed immoderately then; yes, I remember, you actually shook the railings! And," with increasing wrath, "you are smiling now! Of course it must be capital fun to take people in so successfully; to be able to laugh openly as well as in your sleeve."

"Will you permit me to remind you of one small fact? Do you remember that you turned to me and said that if I were rich you would never speak to me again? You were offering a premium on poverty."

"And I repeat that speech here," she said once more, turning to face him.

"Now that I find you *are* rich," she caught her breath, "I will never speak to you again!"

"Oh, come, I say, Miss Gordon, you can't mean that," he expostulated. "At least you will give me a hearing. Be angry, but be just."

She made no reply, but began to strip little bits of bark from the rustic railing, to the utter destruction of her gloves.

"Admitted that I am the millionaire; that is merely to accept the nickname, for it is not I, but my uncle, who is wealthy. He made a fortune in trade, you know, Pollitt's Pearl Barley, and I am his adopted son. He has brought me up ever since I was ten years old, and has been awfully good to me."

Here she made an impatient movement, as much as to say, what was Mr. Pollitt's goodness to her? He hurried on faster.

"I wanted to see something of the world. I was deadly sick of the routine of English life,—hunting, balls, regattas, theatres,—and I got my uncle's consent with great difficulty to spend a year in India. I was despatched with a valet, a cargo of kit, and the reputation of millions, with Waring as my guide, companion, and adviser. He is no relation to me——"

Honor looked at him with a half-ironic smile, as much as to say,—of course not! I should be surprised if he *was*.

"He is Mrs. Pollitt's brother, and she got him the berth, such as it was," pursued the young man, doggedly.

"Little dreaming how luxurious it would become!" added the young lady, sarcastically.

"No; that was quite unpremeditated. When I first landed I found that I had achieved a celebrity far beyond my wishes,—I was supposed to be a Rothschild. I was bothered to death with touts and hawkers, and all that sort of thing," with a constrained laugh. "I saw that I'd have no peace till I got rid of all my extra luggage and the man,—the combination branded me as 'valuable!' Waring had been in the country before. He knew the language and customs, so I made over my account at the bank into his name. He became paymaster, and we held our tongues,—that was all! Waring looks rich, and has a genius for spending and making a splash. Now, I have not. My tastes are inexpensive, and I have always told my uncle that nature intended me for a poor man——"

Miss Gordon plucked off another piece of bark with elaborate care, and then threw it away with an air of profound disgust.

"Our arrangement worked splendidly as long as we

were merely shooting and moving about; but when we came up here and began to know people I saw that things were getting rather mixed, that it would not do, that we were carrying the idea too far. I spoke to Waring, and suggested taking the public into our confidence. He treated that as a joke, and asked if he should announce it in the *Pioneer*; but I said I thought that if he told it to one or two people as a dead secret, that it would be quite sufficient! But he would not hear of this, either in jest or earnest. He had, he acknowledged, played first fiddle too long to wish to change parts. He was most urgent that I should leave what he considered 'well' alone, and worked himself up into such a frightful state of mind,—he put the whole thing so—so—so strongly,—that I was obliged to promise to leave matters in *status quo*."

"Obliged!" echoed his fair listener, in a cool, incredulous tone.

"Yes; forced to do so." He could not tell her of the reason which had been Waring's sole alternative.

"He said we had only a short time to put in; that it would make him look such an awful fool; that he had taken the reins to please me, and now I must sit tight to oblige him. In fact, to tell you a secret, that he would be in dreadful financial difficulties. All he wanted was time. If his creditors believed him to be a poor man, they would be down on him like a flock of kites; two or three months would set him straight. So I yielded; but I made one stipulation,—I said I must tell the truth to one person——"

"And that highly-honoured person?" she asked, with arched brows.

"Was yourself?"

"Oh, *monieur c'en est trop!*" and she made him a deep inclination.

"Don't jeer at me, please," he exclaimed in a low, sharp

voice. "Once I was about to speak, and I was interrupted by the panther. Afterwards, that intolerable child took the words out of my mouth, and you scorned them. For once in her life she told you the truth,—the whole truth. I do love you."

There was no tremble or hesitation about these four syllables, but there was considerable amount of trembling about the hand which held a certain white-feather fan resting on the railings. The fan, unaccustomed to such uncertain treatment, slid swiftly away, and fell, like a dead white bird, into a lily-bod below. No one sought it,—seconds and sensations were priceless.

"I do love you—better than my own life; but I was afraid to speak,—you were so down on money."

How could he guess at the nods and becks and wreathed smiles of certain busy old ladies near Hoyle, who had more than hinted at a speedy wedding and a rich husband, as the result of a trip to India. How could he know of blazing eyes and scarlet cheeks, and of a passionate repudiation of—if not India—at any rate a handsome future partner and money?

"I meant to have told you to-night,—on my honour, I did; but with my usual cruel, bad luck, that little beggar cut in before me! And you are dead against me, and with some reason, I confess. But you must not say that you will never speak to me again. Come, Miss Gordon, give me another chance." As she remained obdurately dumb, he continued, with an air of quiet determination, "You will give me an answer by the time I have fetched your fan."

Honor's anger had, as usual, cooled. She now began to see things from his point of view, and her indignation immediately transferred itself to Captain Waring. Mr. Jervis had been the tool and catpaw of that unscrupulous free-and-easy gentleman. Yes, she now understood the former's halting allusions to hunting and polo, his

half-uttered sentences, and how he had suddenly paused, stammered, and would evidently have been glad to recall his own words. Once or twice she had caught a glimpse, instantly suppressed, of a slightly peremptory manner,—the tone and air of one accustomed to being obeyed,—his easy familiarity with money, his—what she had hitherto considered—insane generosity.

Meanwhile Mark ran down and picked up the white fan from its lily-bed, shook the dew-drops from its delicate feathers, and, as he restored it to its owner, he looked straight into her eyes.

"Honor," he said, in a low, eager voice, "you will let bygones be bygones and forgive me, won't you?"

Honor hesitated; her lips trembled, as if uncertain whether to laugh or to cry.

"You like me a little, I hope," he pleaded, anxiously.

The lips broke into a faint but unmistakable smile.

"You are the only girl I have ever cared two straws about. I swear that this is the truth, and not the usual stock statement. I had a presentiment that you were my fate that night we walked along the railway line; that Eurasian fellow in the hut had a prophetic eye!"

"I am not so sure of that!" she said, with sudden vehemence. "You knew very well that you ought to have spoken out *long ago*."

"I would have spoken to you weeks ago, but that I was uncertain what answer you would give me."

"Oh!" recoiling with a gesture of indescribable horror. "What do you think I meant? I mean that you might have let us all know who you were."

"Better late than never, I hope," he rejoined, quickly. "My uncle knows all about you. May I speak to your aunt to-night?"

"What do you wish to tell her?" she murmured.

"That I am going to be her nephew," he answered, with the utmost composure.

"No—no—no," bursting into a half-hysterical laugh; "you must give me time. I want to think it over."

"Honor," coming close to her, and resolutely taking her trembling hand in his, "can you not think it over *now*? Will you marry me?"

Although her fingers shook in his hold, she held herself nervously erect, as she stood looking out over the moon-flooded mountains in silence, her eyes fixed on the far-away horizon with the gaze of one lost in meditation. She was crowding many thoughts into the space of seconds. Among them this,—

"The gloved hand, in which hers was imprisoned, how strong and steadfast,—a brave hand to guide, and support, and defend her through life."

At last, with tremulous, nervous abruptness, she made this totally irrelevant and unexpected remark,—

"I wonder what people will say when they hear what a dreadful impostor you have been. Of course, I know what they will say of me,—that I have guessed the truth all along, and have played my cards beautifully! Oh, I can hear them saying it!"

And she hastily withdrew her hand, and looked at him with a mixture of defiance and dismay.

"You think more of what people will say than of me, Honor," he exclaimed, reproachfully.

"No, no," filled with eager compunction; and her blushes, as she spoke, were visible even by moonlight.

"I think more of you than of any one, Mark." Then, as if frightened at her own confession, she hastened to add, "Every one is going in, and here is my next partner coming to look for me."

"Let him look!" was the unprincipled answer. "Shall we go down and sit on the seat in the tennis-ground by the verbena-tree?"

"But I am engaged to him," she objected.

"No doubt; but you are engaged to me,—you and I

are to be partners for life. Ah, ha!" with a triumphant laugh, "there, he has been waylaid by Mrs. Troutbeck; he won't get away from her under an hour. They are all going back," glancing at many other couples who were gravitating towards the Club; "we shall have the place to ourselves! Come along," and, leading her down the steps, they passed among glimmering flower-beds and faint sweet flowers to a recently-vacated rustic bench. "I daresay you have often wondered what kept me at Shirani," he began. "I came, in the first instance, hoping to meet my father. He has been thirty years out here. He was in the Indian cavalry, and settled in this country, which he loves. My uncle is my adopted father, and I have seen very little of my real father since I was a kid. He lives in mysterious retirement in these hills about fifty miles away, and is a widower for the second time. I have been waiting on week after week, hoping that he would send for me; that was my chief motive for remaining at Shirani. It is no longer so, as you very well know. In fact, of late, you have driven him clean out of my head!"

"If he were my father, I would go and see him without waiting for an invitation," said Honor, resolutely.

"I have written several times to say that I should like to see him, and asking when I might start. A plain enough hint, surely."

"You are too punctilious,—why wait to be asked? There! that waits is over; what a short one it was,—now I really must go in."

"What a thing it is to have a conscience!—a strong sense of duty to one's partners," he exclaimed, with a laugh. "However, I am one of them myself, and I will let you off easily."

"No, thank you," she answered, with uncompromising rectitude. "Pray, what about your own partners? And you are one of the hosts, too!"

"I see that I may always look to you now to remind me of my duty," he said, rising with extreme reluctance, "and I never felt more inclined to shirk it than now."

"I am sure I shall have quite enough to do to remember my own shortcomings, but at any rate I can manage to remind you of yours to-night. *Wa*," with a happy little sigh, "shall have to-morrow," and she also stood up to depart.

"Yea, please God, thousands of to-morrows. But Honor, this one moment that you are so anxious to pass by and leave behind can never be repeated or effaced,—this hour, when you gave yourself to me here in this overgrown Indian garden under the Southern cross. When we are old Darby and Joan, sitting by our fireside in cold work-a-day England, we shall—at any rate, I shall—look back on this hour as sacred," and he put his arm round her, and kissed her.

* * * * *

The intelligence that Jervis was the Simon Pure, the real true and only millionaire, was buzzed from ear to ear, and had soon spread over the club like wildfire. Mrs. Brande ceased to yawn, fanned herself feverishly, and snappishly refused to believe "one single word of it." Mrs. Langrishe, for once, sat dumb and glum. More unlikely things had happened within her somewhat extensive experience. Colonel Sladen spluttered out his whole vocabulary of ejaculations and expletives, and Lalla Paske's eyebrows were almost lost to sight under her fringes. Of course, it was the one and only topic; the air was still throbbing with the news when, during a pause between two dances, Mark Jervis and Miss Gordon walked into the ball-room. Their entrance produced quite a dramatic effect. How well-bred his air, how fine his profile and the pose of his head, with what easy grace his clothes sat upon him,—clothes that were undeniably fashioned by a first-rate London tailor! These

little details now struck people who had hitherto scarcely spared him a glance. As for Miss Gordon, she was always beautiful and charming. The pair made an uncommonly effective couple, and they looked so radiant that their future happiness was evidently a settled thing. Yes, now that one came to think of it, they had *always* been good friends.

"And was it really thirty thousand a year? Was it in soap or pork? At any rate, it was a magnificent match for a penniless girl," whispered a married lady to her partner.

"Of course, the old woman was in the secret all along," remarked Mrs. Langrishe to a neighbour; "she is much more clever than any of us have supposed. Oh! what a deep game she has played! *What an old serpent!*"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"THE SUMMONS."

In the moonlight, bright as day, Mr. Jervis rode home beside Miss Gordon's rickshaw. Her tell-tale fan stuck out of the pocket of his overcoat.

Yes, their little world was not blind; it was evidently a settled thing. Most people were glad. The Brandes were sure to do the wedding in "style," and a wedding would be an agreeable variety from dances and picnics.

"I shall come up to-morrow morning," he said, as he reluctantly released her hand, "to-morrow before twelve."

Mr. Brande had effected his escape early, had come home, and been in bed and asleep for some hours.

He was suddenly aroused by his wife standing at his

bedside, her cloak hanging off her shoulders, her coiffure a little deranged, a lamp in her hand illuminating an unusually excited countenance.

"Well, *what* is it?" he demanded, with pardonable irritation.

"Oh, P.! what do you think? A man has come from Simla——"

"Yea," suddenly sitting erect, his official mind at once on the alert for some pressing and important despatch.

"He came out with them in the same ship," she panted. Had Sarabella, his wife, gone suddenly out of her mind? "He says that Mark—not Waring—is the rich man."

"He said it after supper, I suppose," snarled Mr. Brande. "He was *drunk!*"

"Not a bit of it. I tackled Mark himself, and he confessed. I was very angry at being taken in; he declares they did it without meaning a bit of harm at first, and that when it went too far he did not know what to do. He is very sorry."

"That he is a millionaire. Oh, yes! I should think so."

"He is coming up first thing to-morrow to tell you all about it and, unless I'm mistaken, to speak to you about Honor."

"What about her?" sharply.

"Why, you dear, stupid man, are you asleep *still*? Can't you guess?"

"You told me that there was nothing of that sort; in fact," with an angry laugh, "that the 'boy,' as you called him, was desperately devoted to you."

"Stuff! He will have thirty thousand a year!" she ejaculated, indignantly. "I know that I shall never close an eye to-night."

"And are good-naturedly resolved that I am to keep you in countenance; you might, I think, have reserved this double-barrelled bombshell for the morning."

"And that's all the thanks I get," she grumbled, as she slowly trailed away to her dressing-room.

Just about this very time Mark Jervis was smoking a cigarette in his bare sitting-room. Before him, on the table, lay a white-leather fan and a programme. He was much too happy to go to bed; he wanted to sit up and think. His thoughts were the usual bright ones incident to love's young dream and, as he watched the smoke slowly curling up, the air was full of castles. These beautiful buildings were somewhat rudely shattered by the entrance of his bearer—wrapped in a resai and looking extremely sleepy—with a letter in his hand.

"A Pahari brought this for the Sahib three hours ago," tendering an exceedingly soiled, maltreated envelope.

Of course it was from his father at last. He tore it open, and this was what it said,—

"MY DEAR SON,—I am very ill. If you would see me alive, come; the messenger will guide you. I live forty miles out. Lose no time.—Your affectionate father,

"H. JERVIS."

The letter was forty-eight hours old.

"Is the messenger here?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, Sahib."

"Then call up the grey pony Syce; tell him to take Gram, and a Jule, and saddle the pony. I am going off into the interior,—I must start in twenty minutes."

The bearer blinked incredulously.

"I need not take you,"—the bearer's face expanded into a grin of intense relief. "I shall be away several days. Get out my riding-kit, shove some clothes in a bag, and ask the cook to put up some bread and meat and things, and tell the coolie I will be ready very shortly."

Then he sat down, drew his writing-case towards him, and began to write a note to Honor. Her first love-letter, and, strange, but true, *his* also! It was merely a

few lines to say he had been most suddenly called away by his father, and hoped that he would be back within the week.

It was both a keen disappointment and a keen pleasure to the girl when the Ayah brought the letter to her at nine o'clock. She read it over and over again; but she will not allow our profane eyes to see it, nor can it be stolen, for she carries it about with her by day, and it rests under her pillow by night. At the end of the week it was getting a little frayed.

When the Ayah handed the note to the Miss Sahib, the writer was already twenty miles out of Shirani, following a broad-shouldered Gurwali, with his head and shoulders wrapped in the invariable brown blanket.

Their course was by mountain bridle-paths and in an eastern direction. The scenery was exquisite; but its beauties were entirely lost upon Jervis, who was picturing other scenes in his mind's eye. The road crept along the sheer faces of bare precipices, or plunged suddenly into woody gorges, or ran along a flat valley, with cultivated fields and loosely-built stone walls. The farther they went the lovelier grew the country, the wilder the scenery. At twelve o'clock they halted to rest the grey pony; the messenger's muscular brown legs seemed capable of keeping up their long swinging trot all day. It was four o'clock in the afternoon when they arrived at their journey's end; they abruptly descended into a flat wooded dale surrounded by hills on three sides, sloping away to the plains on the fourth. A path from the bridle-road led them into a wild jungle of high grass, full of cattle, pack-ponies, and mules. Emerging from this they came to a wall, along which they kept for about three hundred yards, and turning a sharp corner they found themselves outside a great square yellow house, two stories high.

It looked as if it had been bodily transplanted from England. There was nothing irregular or picturesque

about it,—the windows were in rows, the roof was square and had a parapet, the sole innovation was a long verandah, which ran all round the building and was apparently of recent date, a mere after-thought.

Mark, as he rode up to the steps, looked about him for the coolie, but he had suddenly disappeared. There was no one to be seen. He ascended to the verandah; it was deserted save for some fowl, who seemed delightfully at home. It was more the verandah of a native dwelling than the entrance to the home of an Englishman.

Mark looked about him expectantly, and saw three strong charpoys, a bundle of dirty bedding, a pair of shoes, a hukā, and a turban.

The door, which was innocent of paint or bells, was ajar. He pushed it open and found himself in a large, dim, and very dirty hall. Here he was confronted by an old nannygoat and two kids; to the left he saw a room, which appeared to be a mere repetition of the verandah. As he hesitated and looked about, a man suddenly appeared,—a servant, presumably,—wearing a huge red turban and a comfortable blue cloth coat. He was stout and well-to-do, had a fat face, a black square head, and remarkably thick lips.

He seemed considerably disconcerted when he caught sight of the stranger; but, drawing himself up, pronounced the word, "Durwaza, Bund," with overwhelming dignity, adding in English,—

"The Sahib never see no one."

"He will see me," said Mark, with decision.

"Sahib sick, sar,—seeing no one; those my orders. Sahib seeing no Sahibs for many years."

"Well, he sent for me, and I have come. Let me see him immediately,—I am his son."

The Mahomedan's expression instantly changed from lofty condescension to the most unqualified astonishment.

"The Sahib's—son!" he repeated, incredulously.

"Yes. I have told you that once already. Look sharp and send some one to see after my pony; I have come a long distance."

The bearer went away, and remained absent about five minutes, during which time Mark had leisure to note the dirt, and neglected, almost ruinous, state of the house,—which had originally been a fine mansion,—to listen to loud jabbering and whispering in the room beside him, and to note several pairs of natives' eyes eagerly peeping through a crack in the door.

"Come with me," said the bearer, with a sullen air. "The Sahib will see you presently."

"Is he better?"

"Yes, he is quite well; please to sit here," and he opened the door of an immense dining-room, furnished with Bombay carved black wood furniture and a dusty Indian carpet. It was a room that was evidently never used and but rarely opened. Its three great long windows, while caked and dim with grime, looked out upon the snows. This was evidently the back of the house. The front commanded a view of the plains. The site had been admirably selected.

A black tray with cold meat, some very sour bad bread, was borne in, and a place cleared on the dusty table by the joint efforts of the sulky bearer and a Khitmatghar with a cast in his eye, and the very leanest figure Mark had ever beheld. However, he was much too hungry to be fastidious, and devoured the refreshments with a capital appetite. Meanwhile, after their custom, the two men stood by in silence with folded arms, staring with concentrated attention and unremitting gaze.

It was quite dark when the bearer reappeared, and, throwing open a door, announced in a deeply resentful tone,—

"The Sahib will see the Sahib."

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Mark followed the fat, square, aggressive-looking black till he came to a curtained archway, and was ushered into a lofty dim room, so dim that he could barely discern the figure which rose to greet him,—a tall bent man in a dressing-gown.

"Mark, my boy, it was like you to come so soon," said a shaky voice. "Like what you were as a child," and he held out both his hands eagerly.

"I got your letter at four o'clock this morning, sir," said Mark. "I hope you are better?"

"I am for the present. I sent for you by a private messenger post-haste, because I believed that I had but a few hours to live; and I longed desperately to see you."

"I have been hoping you would send for me for the last two months. I have been waiting, as you know, in Shirani."

"Yes—yes—yes! Sometimes the temptation was almost irresistible; but I fought against it, for why should I cloud over your young life? However, I had no choice; the situation has been forced upon me—and you. My faithful companion, Osman, died ten days ago; but we will talk of this another time. These voices in my head interrupt me,—especially that woman's voice!"

His son could not for the life of him think of any immediate or appropriate remark, and sat in embarrassed silence; and then Major Jervis continued,—

"You are six-and-twenty now,—a grown man, Mark, and speak like a man. I have not had a good look at your face yet! I wonder if it is the same face as that of my own honest-eyed boy?"

The answer would be prompt if he so pleased, for the lean Khitmatghar now staggered in under the weight of a large evil-smelling "argand" lamp (a pattern extinct everywhere save in remote parts of India).

Mark looked over eagerly at his father. His head was

bent in his hands. Presently he raised it and gazed at his son with a look of unmistakable apprehension. His son felt as if he were confronting an utter stranger; he would never have recognised this grey-haired cadaverous old man as the handsome, stalwart sabreur he had parted with sixteen years previously. He looked seventy years of age. His features were sharpened as if by constant pain; his colour was ashen, his hands emaciated, his eyes sunken; he wore a camel's-hair dressing-gown and a pair of shabby slippers.

"You are just what I expected," he exclaimed, after a long pause. "You have your mother's eyes, but you are a Jervis. Of course you see a great change in me?"

"Well, yes,—rather," acquiesced his son, with reluctant truthfulness. "India ages people."

"You think this a strange life that I lead, I am sure; miles away from my fellow-countrymen, buried alive, and long forgotten?"

"No, not forgotten, sir. Do you recollect Pelham Brande of the Civil Service? He was asking for you only the other day."

"I think I remember him: a clever fellow, with a very pretty wife, who people said had been a servant. (How long these sort of things stick to people's memories!) I've been out of the world for years."

"But you will return to it. Come back to England with me. What is there to keep you in this country?"

"What, indeed?" with a jarring laugh. "No, my dear boy, I shall never leave the *Pela Bungalow*, as they call it, until I am carried out of it feet foremost."

"Why do you say this? You are a comparatively young man,—not more than fifty-five."

"I feel a thousand years old; and I often wish that I was dead."

"I don't wonder! I should say the same if I had lived here alone for seven years. How do you kill time?"

"I don't kill time. Time is killing me. I walk in the garden sometimes, but generally I sit and think. You must be tired, my boy," as if struck by a sudden thought.

"Well, I am, I must confess. I was at a ball until four o'clock this morning."

"A ball till four o'clock this morning!" he repeated. "How strange it sounds! It seems the echo of a voice speaking twenty years ago."

* * * * *

Dinner was served at a small table; a fowl for Mark, some patent food for Major Jervis. The cooking was atrocious, the attendance careless, the appointments splendid, but grimy. It was the same in every department,—an extraordinary mixture of squalor and magnificence! It seemed to the indignant young man that these ruffians of servants thought anything good enough for his father.

When Major Jervis's *huka* was brought in, he looked over at his son and said,—

"You smoke, of course?"

"Yes, thanks; but not that sort of thing. I would not know how to work it."

Last time he had lit a cigarette between four walls he little guessed at the style of his next surroundings. The room was not uncomfortable, the furniture was massively carved and luxurious, the carpet rich Persian; there were bookcases full of volumes, and there were fine pictures on the walls; but the paper was peeling off in strips, and cobwebs hung like ropes from the corners. The books were grimy with mould, the carpets and curtains inches deep in dust; certainly a sort of oasis had been cleared around Major Jervis's chair; but everywhere the eye turned were tokens of neglect, poverty, and decay. His father's slippers were in holes, his linen frayed; apparently he was a poor man. What had become of the Begum's fortune?

CHAPTER XXXII.

"THE PELA KOTHI," OR "YELLOW HOUSE."

WHEN Mark Jervis awoke the next morning in a totally unfamiliar room, he wondered if he was dreaming as he gazed at the heavy old carved furniture, the faded window-hangings, the curious devotional pictures, and the little black crucifix and holy water receptacle at the foot of the bed. (The Cardozo family had, of course, been Catholics.) No, he was not dreaming, but actually under his father's roof at last. When he had dressed, he went out before breakfast to see after the welfare of his Syce and pony. The yard resembled that of a *serai*, it was so full of natives, who gazed at him enquiringly as he made his way through sheep, goats, buffalo calves, and children to the stables, the tumble-down remains of what had once been an imposing pile; an old, hairy Bhootia pony and his own were now the sole occupants. His Syce came to him eagerly, with a face of pitiful dismay.

"No gram for pony, Sahib," holding up his hands dramatically. "Never giving gram here,—nothing."

"I'll see about that,—go and buy some," handing him rupees.

"Oh, Sahib," now putting his hands into an attitude of prayer. "Plenty, plenty Budmashes in this place. Sahib, let us travel to-day, quickly to Shirani."

"In a few days, Dum Sing, not yet; meanwhile take care of yourself and the pony," and he walked on to the garden. The gardens, though somewhat neglected, were in perfect order in comparison to the house; they were laid out in stony terraces, the walls of which were covered with fruit; there were flowers and vegetables in abundance, a round fish-pond, several statues, summer-

houses, and a large staff of mallees working away with surprising zeal. A broad terrace walk commanded, as you arrived at one end, the snows, and a grand panorama of the plains as you reached the other. A well-worn track was beaten in the middle of this path, which indicated that it was a favourite promenade, and at the end nearest to the plains there was a seat.

Here Mark was joined by his father. He was dressed in a shrunken Puttoo suit, and looked frail and feeble, but such a gentleman, in spite of all his shabbiness.

"This is my walk and my seat," he explained. "I sit here for hours. That white line far below is the cart-road, and with a good glass you can make out carts and tongas, and far away on the plains, twice a day in clear weather, you can see the smoke of the train. So I get some glimpses of the world after all."

"And how are you off for neighbours, sir?"

"My nearest is an American missionary and doctor; he is twelve miles from here; and there is a German mission fifteen miles across that hill," pointing with a stick.

"And your post? What about your letters?"

"Oh, I don't want a post; once in six months or so I send a coolie down to Ramghur."

"Then you don't take a daily paper?"

"Oh, no; why should I? There are stacks of old ones about the house," was the amazing reply.

"And books?"

"I'm a man of one book. I read the Indian Army List. That is quite enough literature for me. Some fellows' names alone call up a whole novel."

"You feel better to-day, I hope?"

"Yes; I am unusually well. You are not married, are you?" he asked abruptly.

"No, not yet," rather startled at the sudden change of topic; "but I hope to marry before long."

"Hope!—hope!—that's what we all say; don't let it go beyond that. Hope told a flattering tale. I don't believe in hope."

"Why not?" enquired his companion rather anxiously.

"You see this terrace," he exclaimed, as if he had not heard. "I walk up and down it exactly a hundred times a day; I take a hundred beans in my pocket and put one of them on that bench every time I come to it. I find it most interesting; only sometimes birds steal my beans, and that puts me out and I lose count, and I have to begin the whole hundred over again, and I get so tired. But I must do it, or they would be angry."

"Who would be angry, sir?"

"I—forget—just this minute,—the beans—or the birds."

"You seem to have wonderfully fine fruit-trees here," said Mark, after an expressively long silence.

"Yes; the mallees work well, the rascals, because I give them all the vegetables and flowers and fruit as well as their wages. They make a good thing out of it; the peaches and pears and plums from the Yellow House are celebrated."

Mark now remembered having heard of their fame in far Shirani.

"Let us sit down here and talk," continued Major Jervis. "For once I will forego my walk; it is not every day that I have my son to listen to me. Recent events seem blurred and dim, but I remember years back distinctly. Mark, my boy, shall I tell you something about myself, and how I have spent my life? Would you care to know?"

"I would, of course."

"Then listen to me. You know I am the younger son of a good old family,—Jervis of Jervis. My father—your grandfather—was General Vincent Jervis, and—

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I can't tell him *that*" (aside to himself). "My family bequeathed me a handsome profile, an aristocratic type of face, and something else—but I can't tell him *that*). I married for love, and I can recommend the experiment; your mother and I scrambled along most happily, though I had always extravagant tastes,—inherited, like my nose and yours. When she died I lost my better half indeed,—my head-piece—my best adviser—my all. I drifted back into my old squandering bachelor ways, and into debt, but I paid for you to the hour. Then I came across Miss Cardozo. She was not very young, but handsome, pleasant, and rich; she fell in love with me. I was a good-looking, dashing, devil-may-care major in a crack native cavalry regiment. She belonged to this country by race and taste; there was a good deal of the Begum about her; she hated the idea of a step-son, and I reluctantly allowed your uncle to adopt you. I know you would be rich and well cared for; but even then I struggled against your uncle's persuasions. I must have had a presentiment of these days, when I would be desolate and alone. I was happy, though, with Mercedes; we led a gay, roving, extravagant life. We had plenty of friends, plenty of spirits, plenty of money. Mercedes had no relations but one, thank God, a greasy-looking cousin in Calcutta. Lord forgive me, but I hate him! My wife had a kind, warm heart, but she was passionate, excitable, and jealous. She allowed her feelings too much liberty; she slapped another woman's face at a public ball, she slipped her servants, she ran up huge bills, and she could never speak the truth. She actually preferred to tell a lie, even when she had nothing to gain by it. Can you imagine such a thing? However, we all have our faults; and she was a good soul, though she was not like your mother. They say a man prefers his first wife, a woman her second husband; what is your opinion, eh, Mark?"

"I am not in a position to offer one," he answered, with a smile.

"Oh, I forgot. Of course not. Well, eight years ago this very month we were coming away from Mussoori to our place in the Doon. We were in the mail tonga; our ponies were half broken; though we had a good driver, the best on the road, it was all he could do to hold them as they rattled down, with the heavy steel bar going clank! clank! clank! Just one mile out, a goat on the cliff dropped suddenly into the road; the brutes shied wildly across; the strong wooden railings caught the side of the tonga; they strained,—I hear them now,—snapped, crashed; then there was a moment's mad struggle of driver and ponies,—too late! over we went! They show the place still, I dare say,—a drop of two hundred feet. The ponies were killed, and the driver and my wife. How I escaped was a marvel; my leg was broken, my head cut about, but I survived. Osman, my orderly, who had been in the old regiment for twenty years, nursed me at Mussoori, and as soon as I could be moved I came here. I remembered it as a retired, quiet spot, with a charming garden. I wanted rest; my head was injured, and I thought I would pull myself together here and then go home, but here I am still."

"Yes, but not for much longer," added his son, cheerily; "you will come home with me."

"Mercedes's will was produced," he proceeded, calmly ignoring the question; "she had made it when she was not pleased with me, seemingly. This place and three hundred acres are mine, and one thousand rupees a month for life; also her jewels and gold ornaments,—as much use to me as a heap of stones. Fernandes receives a fine income even now. All her wealth accumulates till my death, and then everything—jewels, rents, shares,—goes to him. He is my heir; I cannot leave you a penny, nothing but the old Yellow House."

"I don't want the Cardozo money, sir."

"No, and you will have plenty. Meanwhile, Fuzzil Houssean spends my income on his relations to the third and fourth generation, and laughs and grows fat."

"Surely you do not leave it all in his hands?"

"Yes, most of it. Only for that, I suppose he would poison me. I believe he is in Fernandez's pay,—Fernandez, whom I am keeping out of thousands a year. Occasionally he comes in person to see if there is any chance of my dying. I have given him great hopes more than once. Now that Osman is dead, he and Fuzzil will certainly hurry me out of the world, and that speedily."

"Who was Osman?"

"He was a sowar in my regiment,—a Sikh. We had known each other for half a lifetime, and he was more to me than a brother. We joined the same month, we left the same day. He gave up home, country, people, and followed my fortunes, and died in my arms last week;" and Major Jervis's voice became almost inaudible.

"We had braved heat and snow, fire and water, together, and in the long evenings here, whilst I smoked my pipe, he would talk to me by the hour of the old regiment; such talk is better than any book. If Osman had lived, I never would have summoned you,—no, never. He stayed with me till death took him, and you must remain here till death takes me."

"I will take you with me," said his son resolutely. "All you have been telling me shows me that this country is not the place for you. The sooner you are back in England the better. You will come home with me, will you not?"

"I don't want to see England," he answered peevishly. "India is my country; it has got into my blood. I have spent my bright days out here, and here I'll spend my dark ones. My days are dark indeed; but they will soon

be over, and so much the better. And now it is eleven o'clock," he said, rising stiffly. "Let us go into breakfast."

After breakfast Major Jervis promptly disappeared, leaving his guest to wander about alone: to wonder at the extraordinary *ménage*, the troops of native children pattering in and out, the fowl, the goats,—who stumped through the hall as if they wore boots,—the overpowering smell of huka, the great dreary rooms piled up with rotting furniture, saddlery, and carpets. Among other wrecks he noticed an old dandy and a side-saddle,—doubtless the property of the dead Mercedes.

He strolled about the valley to the amazement of the hill people, who stared at him open-mouthed. How, he asked himself, was he to pass the long empty hours till sunset? for the bearer had condescendingly assured him that "the Sahib would sleep until then." He had taken a violent dislike to fat-cheeked Fuzzil, who scarcely troubled himself to obey an order, and had invariably to be summoned several times before he condescended to appear. A civil Pahari, touched by the young Sahib's forlorn and aimless wanderings, volunteered to guide him to the cantonment. "A cantonment here?" he echoed incredulously, and accepted the offer with alacrity. A brisk walk by narrow tracks and goat-paths brought them to the brow of a hill in a southward direction, overlooking an abandoned station, Mark's guide volubly explaining to him that thirty years before had been full of gorrah-log (soldiers) from the plains. There were the barracks, the bungalows, and gardens with trees that bore apples even now. But the cholera came one year and killed half a pultoon (regiment), and the rest went away and never came back, except once or twice, so folks said, for "a tamasha."

"A tamasha! What do you mean?" asked Jervis, sharply. Was this burly hill man daring to chaff him?

"Sahibs and Mem Sahibs,—eating, drinking, and having music and nautches. For the rest," with a shrug, "the place was given over to Bhoots and fiends!"

A wide cart-road, grass-grown, led into the deserted cantonment, and Mark followed it on to the parade-ground. There was the mess-house still habitable; the church, roofless, encircled by a well-filled God's acre, kept in perfect order. Here was, indeed, a most surprising sight!—a graveyard in the wilds, not overgrown or choked with weeds and bushes, but every stone and slab free from moss, every grave tended with reverent care. He went into the old echoing mess-house, and found it in excellent repair, thanks to its beams and doors of deodar wood, as the Pahari proudly pointed out. There were at least twenty bungalows standing, half buried among trees and jungle, with creepers matted down over their windows; in some the verandahs had given way, in some the roofs had fallen in; some, on the other hand, appeared to set time at defiance. The site was beautifully chosen, nestling in the lap of the hills, with a peep of the far-away plains. Not a sound was to be heard save the trickling of a streamlet, nor a living thing to be seen save a few hill cattle, and under a tree some vultures, who were picking the bones of a dead pony. The condemned cantonment was, for all its beauty, a melancholy place. Beyond Hawal-Ghat, and sloping towards the plains, were fields of golden corn, and villages sheltering in clumps of trees, picturesque bananas waving their graceful leaves over huts, that with their comfortable slab roofs resembled English cottages.

The coolie now explained that he wished to show his honour yet another sight, and to guide him home by a different route.

Half an hour's climbing brought them to a good-sized village, of carved-fronted, flat-roofed, hill houses. To the stranger's horror it seemed to be altogether populated

by lepers,—lepers who were old, middle-aged, young; there were also leper children. They swarmed out and surrounded the Sahib, exhibiting every form of their hideous disease as they clamoured for assistance. Mark emptied his pockets of everything they contained in the shape of money, dispensed alms hastily and among the worst cases, and then hurried away. He felt heartily ashamed of his feelings of shuddering repulsion. Supposing he had been a leper himself, and such things as Englishmen who were lepers were known to exist. Still, he turned away headlong from that awful village of life in death, and hastily reascended the hill towards the Pela Kothi.

The desolate cantonment and the leper colony combined to depress him beyond words; although the scenery was unsurpassed, the air as exhilarating as a tonic, and the scents and sounds of the forest enough to stir the most torpid imagination. Nevertheless, Mark Jervis felt as if he had a load upon his back,—as if he had grown ten years older in the last two days. It was not merely the scenes of the afternoon that preyed on his spirits. There was his father; his mind was undoubtedly shaken. He must endeavour to get him away, to take him home,—yes, at all costs.

"What a curious way he talked!—sometimes so well and sensibly, sometimes in such incomprehensible jargon. What did he mean by saying, 'Osman stayed here till death took him; you must remain here until death takes me?'"

CHAPTER XXXIII

"HEREDITARY."

His long afternoon rest had revived Major Jervis. He appeared to be another man as he sat opposite his son at dinner, and talked not merely sensibly, but wittily, across the grimy tablecloth, on which was exhibited smoked goat chops and other undesirable comestibles. He discussed the condemned cantonment,—he recollected its bygone existence. The lepers: they were his pensioners, and came for their dole weekly; they were well looked after between missionaries and other people. He spoke of his regiment, his former comrades; he gave vivid descriptions of shikar expeditions, of pig-sticking, of thrilling scenes on active service; he related anecdotes of well-known people of his acquaintance; he boasted of his brothers-in-arms, and described a polo tournament as if it had come off yesterday!

"And you have quite lost sight of all these friends?" enquired his son, after a pause.

The question seemed to break a spell; all animation suddenly faded from the major's face. His whole expression changed into that of a shrunken old man as he replied,—

"Yes; I left the herd, like a wounded deer, seven long years ago. I have hidden myself from them, and I am entirely forgotten. People are forgotten out here sooner, more completely, than in any other country."

"Why do you say so?" asked his son incredulously.

"Because life is so full, events march rapidly, changes occur daily. Cholera, war, accidents, sweep away men—and memories."

When the table had been cleared and cigarettes pro-

duced, and Fuzsil and his satellite had somewhat reluctantly departed, Major Jervis looked steadily at his companion for some time, and exclaimed at last,—

"You are very like me, Mark. I can see it myself, and I was considered a good-looking fellow. I had a bigger frame, though,—I rode a couple of stone heavier. But you are a stronger man than your father: you have a square jaw and a stern will. You can say no,—I never could get out that word in time, and many troubles were my lot. You wish me to go home with you, my boy?"

"I do," was the laconic and emphatic reply.

"And I want you to stay with me. You must remain with me. I have not long to live. Look at me well."

Mark glanced at his sunken eyes, his worn, emaciated features.

"And you must see the last of me. I don't intend to let you go,—no; for once I, too, can say no."

"But, nevertheless, I'm afraid you must let me go, sir, and shortly. I promised Uncle Dan——"

"Yes!" he interrupted, with unexpected passion, "I understand what you would say,—that you would thrust your uncle down my throat. But, after all, are you not my son—not his? I reared you until you were ten years old. When you were a small child and burning with fever, who was it that used to walk up and down with you in his arms for hours? Not your uncle Dan. Who was it that first set you on the back of a pony and taught you to sit like a Bengal sowar? Not your uncle Dan. Who was it that lifted you out of your dying mother's embrace? Not your uncle Dan. You are my own flesh and blood. In all the wide world I have now no one but you. Since Osman died I have not a single friend; I am surrounded by vampires of servants. My heir prays on his knees nightly to his patron saint for the telegram that will carry the news of my death. I believe the form is here in Fuzsil's possession,—filled up, all but the date!

I am a miserable, solitary, dying wretch, and I appeal to you—my son—to spare me a few months of his healthy, happy life, and to stay beside me and protect me. Do I," leaning his elbows on the table and searching his son's face intently, "appeal in vain?"

"You wish me to live here with you altogether?"

"Yes," with curt emphasis.

"To give up my uncle?"

"For a time, yes. I seem cruelly selfish, but I am as a drowning man snatching at a spar. You *will* stay?" A tremor ran through his voice.

"I cannot. No; I promised Uncle Dan that I would certainly return," rejoined his son firmly.

"Your uncle has health, wealth, a wife, and many friends. Surely he can spare you to a sick and desolate man. The Almighty has afflicted me sorely. If you abandon me to my fate, and gallop back to your gay life and companions, the day will come when you will bitterly repent it. Osman's burthen has fallen on you; and will my own son do less for me than an alien in blood, a Mahomedan in faith, a poor, unenlightened, faithful sower?"

And he stretched out his hand and fixed an interrogative gaze on his companion. The paleness of concentrated feeling tinged the young man's face,—a few drops of sweat stood on his forehead.

"Mark, what is your answer?" he demanded in a hoarse whisper. "Be quick; say yes or no,—yes or no."

"Not now, sir," suddenly standing up. "You must give me time. Give me forty-eight hours."

"Ah, there is something more than your uncle," with a swift, expressive glance. And he rose and put his hands heavily on his son's shoulders. "I know," gazing straight into his eyes, with a mad keenness in his look. "There is, of course, a woman in the case."

"There is," admitted Mark, holding himself erect.

"An hour before I got your letter I had asked a girl to be my wife."

"And you need not tell me her answer!—yes, of course. Young, rich, handsome! The world is full of women, overrun with them. A man can have fifty sweethearts, but he has only one father!"

"There is only one sweetheart in the world for me," returned his son proudly.

Major Jervis drew himself up with an air of formidable dignity and deliberately surveyed the speaker in sarcastic silence. Suddenly his expression changed and became charged with fury. He made a frantic gesture as if he would sweep both son and his sweetheart off the face of the earth. Then he tore back a purdah, beyond which he instantly disappeared, leaving it quivering behind him.

After waiting for a quarter of an hour, Mark went up to his own room, which he began to pace from end to end. Presently he turned down the lamp, flung open the window, looked out, and drew a long, long breath. His temples throbbed like engines in his burning head. Every fibre of his being, every shred of his understanding, was now engaged in an inner soul struggle.

On one side was arrayed Honor Gordon, his good-hearted, indulgent uncle, to whom he was sincerely attached,—friends, wealth, the life to which he was accustomed,—a life of ease and sunshine. On the other hand there was *this*!—and he gravely surveyed the dim, weird landscape, the starlit sky, stretching to the mysterious horizon, and shuddered,—his afflicted, forlorn father, who would not be removed, and who could not be abandoned.

His father, who had cared for him in his childhood. Yes, it was *his* turn now; and would he be behind Osman, the Mahomedan, who had done from love what he should do from duty?

"His father might live years! Was he a brute to wish him dead? *Did* he wish his father dead?" he asked himself fiercely, and shuddered again. What was he coming to? Had two days in the jungle turned him into a beast?

If he accepted what was plainly his duty his uncle would cast him off, and he must renounce Honor Gordon! Was this a home to bring her to? common sense grimly demanded. And he would now be penniless indeed! He was tortured with heart-wearing doubts and temptations, as duty or inclination gained the upper hand. Two nights ago he could not sleep for happiness; now he could not rest for misery! He resolved to walk down this raging fever, to quell this mental turmoil by sheer bodily fatigue. He made his way through the silent house, where he found all the doors open, and nearly fell over a goat and two kids who were dozing in the hall; otherwise the lower regions were untenanted.

Suddenly he became aware of a great noise and brilliant light outside,—laughing, loud chattering, and the complacent humming of dissipated tom-toms! The compound was illuminated by a large fire and half a dozen flaming torches, and crowded with a mob of natives, who were enjoying with intense appreciation the solemn gyrations and shrill high-pitched songs of a couple of tawdry Nautch girls. The surrounding go-downs were full of animated visitors: one was evidently a drinking den, whilst in another were gamblers. Standing in the shadow on the steps, unnoticed, Jervis surveyed these orgies entirely at his leisure. He distinguished the khit-matghar (though without a turban), his sleek black hair parted like a woman's and falling over his shoulders. He was playing cards with three other men; a bottle and a beaker stood by for general enjoyment. The "khit" was absorbed in the game; his eyes seemed to protrude from his head as they greedily followed the

cards. Meanwhile, Fuzzil was solemnly superintending the Nautch, and applauding occasionally with fitful, tipsy, condescension.

A few sharp words from the young Sahib, who appeared among them like a spirit, had an electrical effect. An awed and immediate silence was followed by a simultaneous helter-skelter rush and scurry.

"What is the meaning of this madness?" demanded the Sahib, sternly, of Fuzzil, who, with drunken valour, stood his ground, whilst the Nautch girls, tom-toms, and spectators melted away like so many rabbits scuttling to their burrows.

"Madness!" repeated Fuzzil, with an air of outraged dignity. "It is a grand tamasha for the marriage of my wife's brother's son. Does the Sahib not like Nautches and cards and drink, like other young Sahibs? Of a surety he *does*!" answering his own question with insolent emphasis and a little stagger. "As for madness! this house is a poggle-khana" (madhouse).

"What do you mean, you rascal?" said Jervis, sharply.

"Of a truth, all the world knows that! Is the fair-haired Sahib, his son, the *last* to learn that the old man is mad? Ask the doctor, ask Cardoso Sahib. Sometimes for one year he never speaks. Sometimes bobbery, and trying to kill himself. But Osman took care of him. Now, lo, Osman is dead, there will be an end soon! This house will cease to be a poggle-khana, and all the worthy 'nouker log' (servants) can return to their own country."

"You, for one, can return to-morrow," responded the Sahib, in surprisingly fluent Hindustani.

"You are not the master here," blustered Fuzzil, in amazement; "I taking no orders."

"You will find that I am, and if you ever again come into my presence with your shoes on your feet, I will thrash you within an inch of your life. Send away all



these people Tell them the tamasha is over for to-night; put out the lights, get to your go-down, and sleep yourself sober."

Fuzzil stared, swallowed, gasped. The young man's resolute air and stern eye were altogether too much for him, and he obediently slunk off without further dispute.

Major Jervis did not appear the next morning, and his son mounted his pony and went for a long ride. Where he went he but vaguely remembered; his mind was too preoccupied to note his surroundings. There was no doubt that his father's mind was affected: no doubt this was attributable to the fall over the khud, and injury to his head. The question he asked himself, Was he, Mark Jervis, to sacrifice his youth to filial duty?—one would soon grow old in the Yellow Kothi—to renounce friends, fortune, sweetheart, to lead a semi-savage existence, entirely cut off from what is called life?

But, on the other hand, if he set his pony's head for Shirani, and returned to Honor,—to all the delights of the world,—would not the recollection of the miserable father he had abandoned to strangers poison every pleasure, and force itself into every joy?

"But to live there!" and he drew rein, and gazed down upon the square house standing out distinctly against a blue, purplish background, "will be," he exclaimed aloud, "a living death! Like a vain young fool, I wanted a chance to do something—some special task, some heroic deed—that would set me apart from other men. But God knows I never thought of this!"

It was late in the afternoon when he rode up to the verandah, and was amazed to meet a coolie leading away a steaming-hot hill pony,—a hired animal; and more surprised still to discover a visitor comfortably established in a long chair, with his fat legs elevated above his head, enjoying a peg and a cheroot. Evidently there was no occasion to ask him to make himself at home! The

stranger slowly put down his foot and stood on them when he first caught sight of Mark.

After staring hard for a few seconds, he said, with an air of great affability, "I am Fernandez Cardozo, and you are Major Jervis's son,—my cousin."

"I am Major Jervis's son," assented the young man stiffly, and he, in turn, critically surveyed his father's heir. He was low-sized, fleshy, and swarthy, about forty years of age; he had a closely-cropped bullet head, sprinkled with grey hairs, a round, good-natured face, a pair of merry black eyes, and a large mouthful of flashing white teeth. An Eurasian, and possibly not a bad sort of fellow, was Mark's verdict.

The other was thinking, "What a fine young man! Quite tip-top. Strange, it seemed, that he should be the son of the poor, crazy old major inside;" and his eyes travelled over his smart country-bred pony, his English saddlery, his well-cut boots and clothes.

"Yes, you are his son," he said at last; "but I am his heir. We are son and heir," and he laughed—an oily laugh.

"You are heir, of course, to Mrs. Cardozo—I mean Mrs. Jervis's fortune. Won't you sit down?"

"You have not been long here, have you?" now re-seating himself.

"No; only two or three days."

"And how," with a jerk of his thumb in the direction of the major's apartments, "do you find the old man?"

"Well, I never knew until now that his mind was rather—affected. He has not written to me for years, and I only got his address with difficulty."

"Yes; he prefers to lie low as Mr. Jones. But 'rather affected' is putting it mildly."

"Do you think so?" considering Cardozo with a pair of hostile eyes.

"You will think so, too, before long. Now don't be



vexed with me, my dear boy. No one is ever angry with Ferdy Cardozo; they know I am a good fellow, and that I mean well. Shall we go inside and see if there is anything to be had to eat?"

"Certainly; I ought to have thought of it before."

"Oh, please don't apologise; I'm quite at home. Fuzzil, you fat, lazy swine," to the now obsequious bearer, "get me something to eat,—none of your dog's food, such as brain cutlets or Irish stew; and bring up some of my wine. It's very hot in here, awfully frousty," opening a window. "The major hates me like poison, and when he hears I'm in the house he won't come out; he will go to ground like a snake. But I shall be off to-morrow."

"Yes?" interrogatively.

"Are you in the army?" continued Fernandez, with half-closed eyes.

"No. I am not in the regular army; I'm in the yeomanry."

"No profession, then?" raising his arched brows in rather supercilious surprise.

"No, not any." His profession as heir to his uncle Dan would soon be a thing of the past.

Mr. Cardozo's surmise was perfectly correct. Major Jervis did not appear. He merely sent his salaams and dined in his own apartment, leaving his son and his heir to consume that meal *à la carte*. It was a great improvement on the usual menu. Evidently Fuzzil had resources that he drew upon on worthy occasions.

"It's a fine moonlight night," remarked Fernandez. "Let us go and smoke in front of the house; it's better than being in-doors, and I like to make the most of the hill air when I'm up, and we are out of the way of cave-droppers."

In a few moments they were sitting on the low wall in front of the *Pela Kothi*.

"Osman was a desperate loss," began Fernandez, as he struck a fusee,—*"a desperate loss."*

"So I gather from what I hear," assented his companion.

"That's partly what brought me up. I have business round here, of course, though. I live in Calcutta. I like to keep my eye on the property, and I look after the major and manage his affairs as well as I can. I feel it my duty." He began to smoke.

Was there yet another man, of no kin to Major Jervis, who was to put his own flesh and blood to shame?

"I wish you would tell me something about my father; the last seven years are a sealed page to me."

"Well, first of all he got a fall on his head pig-sticking, and that made him rather foggy for a bit,—he saw everything double. Then, of course, the tonga business was a finisher. Osman brought him here, and at times he was perfectly well, as sane as you or I, and interested in the garden, and the news, and all that; but he got worse by degrees, fits of silence and depression, never opening his lips for maybe a whole year,—melancholy, suicidal mania, tried to hang himself with a stirrup-leather,—you understand," lowering his voice expressively.

"I—I understand," acquiesced the other almost in a whisper.

"He must have some one always with him more or less,—some one whom he likes, and who has influence and a strong will, such as Osman; he was invaluable. I don't know how we are to find a substitute for him," continued Fernandez thoughtfully, as he crossed his legs, leant his elbow on his knee, and puffed meditatively.

"The servants he has about him now must be shunted," said Mark, emphatically. "I never saw such a pack. They had a feast and tom-toms last night. They are lazy, insolent, useless blackguards."

"Not a doubt of it," agreed Fernandez, cheerfully.

"And Fuzzil will retire a rich man, keep a gharry, and send his sons to college. They come here fairly decent servants, but the desperately dull life—no bazaar, no other 'nauker log' to bukh with,—is a want no wages can repay. Then the household has no head, no regular hours, and so they all do as they please, and go to the bad. I don't know what is to be done now; your father won't allow a stranger near him. The question is, Who is to replace Osman? Tell me that!" and he flung out his hand with a dramatic gesture.

"I will replace Osman," was the totally unexpected reply.

"You!" cried Cardoso, gazing at the speaker with round-eyed incredulity; his face was pallid, his lips set hard. "You don't know what you are saying," and he took his cheroot out of his mouth and continued to stare at his companion exhaustively. "You are accustomed to the big world of London; you have seen and done what I have only read about,—for I have never been home. You are accustomed to a whirl of society, to novelty, excitement, luxuries, and immense wealth. You to live here? Upon my word! Excuse me, my dear fellow, the very *idea* makes me laugh. Even I, born and bred in the country, would go mad in a very short time. I could not stand the life for more than a week,—a month would kill me!"

"I am not so easily killed as you imagine. I am tougher than you think," rejoined Jervis.

"But you do not know what you would have to endure," throwing out his arms excitedly. "The solitude, the silence, day after day, exactly the same,—breakfast, tiffin, dinner, bed—nothing to do. Nothing to hope for, no one to see, except the hill-folk or a missionary. I tell you that you would do one of two things,—either cut your throat or take to drink."

"Your eloquence is a loss to the bar, Cardoso."

"So I have often been told," with a hasty movement of his hand; "but it is not a question now of my eloquence, but of your future. Do you generally mean what you say? Do you intend to live here as your father's sole companion?"

"I do," replied the young man, answering his look with eyes full of indomitable fire.

Mr. Cardoso puffed away in solemn silence for some time, but there was a certain briik cheerfulness in his air as he suddenly remarked,—

"The major is going downhill rapidly, poor old chap! His health is bad. I see a great change in him; his mind will never recover. Of course *that* is not to be expected; you know that it runs in the family,—it is hereditary."

"What runs in the family? What is hereditary?" demanded the other, with a look full of pain and excitement.

"Insanity. He told Mercedes, who told me, that his brother jumped overboard at sea, going home in charge of two keepers; and his father died in Richmond lunatic asylum."

"Is—this—true?" Mark brought out the words in three quick gasps.

"You don't mean to say that you never knew? Oh, I'm awfully vexed! I forgot you were his son. You are so different, upon my word, as you stand there, I cannot realise that he is anything to you."

Jervis struggled to articulate again, but signally failed. With a shaking hand he tossed his cigarette over the parapet, and then walked away up the steps, and was instantly merged in the gloom of the entrance.

"Hereditary!" The word seemed written before him in letters of flame,—*"hereditary!"*

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE INITIALS "H. G."

WHEN it became known at the club, and subsequently all over Shirani, that young Jervis had suddenly disappeared the night of the bachelors' ball, great was the sensation.

No, no, there was no suspicion of foul play; there were his servants to be questioned. Jan Mahomed, his respectable, grey-bearded attendant, had declared that the night his master had come home, he had got straight from his evening clothes into his riding things, and had taken the grey pony and galloped away into the darkness. Whither? How could he say? holding out a pair of lean, empty hands, with a gesture of pitiable ignorance. He made no mention of the letter, for this prudent retainer had lived with bachelor sahibs before.

Mrs. Langrishe and Lalla were for once agreed. They were convinced that Mark Jervis had gone further than he had intended with Miss Gordon and, to repair the error, had subsequently put miles between them,—was probably by this time on blue water. But they did not venture to air this opinion openly; it was reserved for "ladies only." Major Langrishe had laughed it to scorn; and as for Toby Joy, he and Lalla almost had a quarrel on the subject,—their very first quarrel!

"Jervis to propose to a girl, and then run away!" he cried indignantly. "About the last fellow in Shirani to do such a mean trick. Jervis is a gentleman to the soles of his boots, and a real good chap, worth fifty of Waring."

"Yes, so we all learn *now*, when it's rather late in the day," retorted Lalla, sarcastically.

"You mean about the money. But I mean in other

ways. He took it awfully well the day I nearly smashed up him and Mrs. Sladen; you saw that yourself. He certainly lay low with regard to the fact of his being wealthy. He is the least ostentatious fellow I ever met, and as straight as a die, a complete contrast to the great Clarence, who has been playing the deuce up at Simla, by all accounts, and making ducks and drakes of any quantity of coin."

"Well, at least, we know *where* he is and *what* he is doing!" retorted Lalla. "But no one can say the same of the cousin. Where is he, and what is *he* doing? He was always very close about himself, and I consider the whole thing most suspicious. Supposing a man proposed for me."

"Yes, supposing a man proposed for you," repeated Toby, edging nearer to the lady.

"And I accepted him. Now, don't look so utterly idiotic, for mercy's sake! And he simply took to his heels and ran away, would I not think that peculiar conduct? I must say Honor Gordon takes it better than I should under the circumstances."

"How soon are you going to get rid of that fellow Gloster?" enquired Toby, irrelevantly.

Sir Gloster was bringing a tedious convalescence to an end, and taking daily airings in Mrs. Langrishe's rickshaw; and people who were disappointed of a wedding in one quarter were eagerly expecting to hear of one in another.

"I don't know," coquettishly. "Perhaps I may *never* get rid of him."

"You know you only say that to make me wretched. You don't really mean it, do you?" pleaded Toby, with such a look of misery on his usually merry face that Miss Paske burst into an uncontrollable scream of laughter, and said,—

"Toby, how can you be so exquisitely silly?"



The few days Mark Jervis had written of had grown into ten, and he had almost slipped out of people's minds, save when a string of ponies, being led along by their Syces and wearing smart jhools, with the initials M. J., brought him momentarily to remembrance.

And now Captain Waring suddenly reappeared. He came direct from Simla, back to despised Shirani, and in anything but his usual cheery spirits. How he had cursed his coolies and ponies on the way up! What a life the *débonnaire* Clarence had led his miserable servants, as if the poor wretches were responsible for his discomfiture, his bad luck, his ruin,—for it had come to that; and it was a desperate man who spurred his distressed country-bred pony up the last two miles of the dusty cart-road.

He was surprised to find Haddon Hall tenantless; but when the bearer explained how a Pahari had brought a note, and his master had gone "ek dum,"—i.e., on the spot, he nodded his sagaciously, and appeared to understand all about it. What he could not comprehend was Mark's prolonged absence. "Ten days old," Mahomed said; "two days, were he in Mark's shoes, would be amply sufficient time to devote to his eccentric parent."

Clarence was in a bad plight, and almost at the end of his resources, which had hitherto been as unfailing as the widow's cruse. He had gambled recklessly with stronger men than himself; he had thrown good money after bad, in the usual wild attempt to recover both. His I.O.U.'s and debts of honour and lottery accounts came to a large total. He would be posted in a few days if he did not pay up. As to other debts, they were legion,—shop bills, club and mess accounts, wages; they poured down on him in all directions ever since that little brute Binks had peached at Simla and spoiled everything. Miss Potter had bitterly upbraided him, and subsequently snubbed him unmistakably; the men at the club looked

coldly on him; the high players in the card-room had seemed stiff, and curiously averse to his "cutting in." People suddenly stopped talking when he joined them. Yes, he was at a crisis in his life,—a crisis brought on by his own insane recklessness and raging passion for play. He had come expressly to Shirani to get Mark to assist him; if he failed him, if he refused to stretch out a hand and drag him back from the gulf of insolvency and disgrace on the brink of which he tottered, down he must go, and be swept away and swallowed up among the thousands and thousands who have similarly gone under.

After a bath, a meal, and a smoke, Captain Waring felt better, and set to work to think things out steadily, and to pull himself together. He had sold his own ponies and guns,—their price was a sop to his most urgent creditors. He would now proceed to dispose of Mark's battery. Yes, they were fine weapons; he would put them and the ponies on the notice-board at the club at once; the price of them would pay their passages and immediate expenses; Mark's five hundred pounds would cover all debts; he had not a rupee left at the agent's, and he would make Mark come home at once. It was true that their year's leave had yet four months to run,—this was the middle of June; but he had made India too hot to hold him for the second time. The sooner he set about winding up affairs the better, and he rose on the spur of the moment, resolved to cast an eye over his cousin's saleable effects.

He went into Jervis's room, the smaller and worst of the bedrooms, and very plainly furnished. There was a bare camp bed, a rickety chest of drawers, a washed-out dhurrie on the floor, also a long row of boots, a couple of saddles on a stand, and a first-rate battery of guns. "A double-barrel central-fire breech-loader, by Purdy, that will fetch two hundred and fifty rupees; a five hundred express, by Lancaster, four hundred rupees;

eight-bore rifle, six hundred rupees; rook rifle, one hundred,—say thirteen hundred rupees," was his mental calculation.

When he had examined these, a parcel on the chest of drawers arrested his attention; there was also a programme. He took it up and looked it over; he was extremely inquisitive in such small matters. The card was full, and opposite three dances were scribbled the initials "H. G."

"Humph!" he muttered aloud. "So *that* is going on!" And as his gaze travelled to a ladylike parcel in silver paper, "What the dickens is *this*?"

He promptly unrolled it and beheld a most superior white ostrich feather fan, with the monogram H. G. on the handle. Captain Waring unfurled it, fanned himself slowly, folded it up once more, and said,—

"A feather shows how the wind blows, Mark, my boy! Well, I'll go over to the club and hear what is going on, look up the mail steamers, and offer your ponies and rifles, my fine fellow. You will have to come home with me sooner than you think, and I'll get great kudos from the uncle for carrying you off from a dangerous entanglement,—in other words, from H. G."

And Captain Waring sauntered out to the stables in a surprisingly good humour.

"I'm sorry he has got the grey with him!" he muttered to himself; "the grey is a long way the best of the three; the grey is worth five hundred rupees."

Strange to say, the grey, carrying his owner, arrived home that same day about four o'clock, much to the bearer's joy. His master spent the afternoon packing, making arrangements, giving orders, and writing letters. He announced that he was going away again the next morning, and Jan Mahomed and his son were to follow with all his baggage. In future he would live with his father near Hawal-Ghât.

Jan Mahomed received this astounding piece of information in the usual native fashion, merely with a stolid face and a salaam.

Yes, his choice was made, the die cast, to Major Jervis's intense satisfaction, and to Fernandez Cardozo's intense amazement. The former had been ill, and had detained his son from an earlier return to Haddon Hall, to wind up his affairs and open his letters; the latter including one from his uncle, which had been lying on the writing-table for a whole week. It said,—

"DEAR MARK,—Yours received, and I answer it within the hour. I note all you say about the young lady, and I don't like the idea *at all*. My boy, you know I have never refused you anything, but I must say *no* to this. I have only your welfare at heart. I cannot allow you to throw yourself away on an ordinary Indian spin. You are right to tell me all about it, and, as you have not yet proposed for her, *don't*. You must marry some pretty, well-born girl, who has never been through the Suez Canal. Come home immediately; these idle days in a hill station have had a bad effect on your steady brain. Come home as soon as ever you can. Your father has evidently become naturalised; he does not want you,—*i do*. As for the girl, you might give her a pony, or a diamond brooch,—anything, everything, but yourself.

"Your affectionate uncle, }

"D. POLLITT."

As Mark looked up from this letter he met the scrutinising black eyes of Jan Mahomed which were fixed upon his face.

"This Sahib has been ill," he said severely; "jungle fever getting?"

"No, Jan, I am all right. This is the day the English dâk goes out, and I want you to take a letter to the post for me,—it will be ready in twenty minutes; and send word to the Captain Sahib that I have come back."

Then he drew his writing-case towards him and began a letter to his uncle. Evidently this letter was not an

easy composition,—in fact, he had already written it several times at Hawal-Ghât, and then instantly destroyed it; but it must be written somehow, and now. The post left within the hour. At length he wrote:

"DEAR UNCLE DAN,—Since I last wrote to you I have been with my father. He sent for me suddenly, and I went off the same hour, as his note said that he was very ill. I found him living forty miles from this, in an isolated house, part of the Cardozo property, and under the name of Mr. Jones,—a name he has adopted for the last seven years. I never would have recognised him, he is so broken down, and quite an infirm old man. This is the effect of the accident that killed his wife. But this is not the worst! His mind is deranged, which accounts for his strange silence, and many other things. At times, such as at the present moment, he is perfectly clear and collected; but at others he suffers from depression and melancholia, and sits silent for days and weeks. He is alive to his own infirmity, and that is why he has chosen this life of seclusion. Until recently he had one of his former sowers living with him, an invaluable companion; and now that he is dead,—an irreparable loss,—Uncle Dan, I am going to tell you something that will be a shock as well as displeasing to you: I am about to take the place of this faithful servant, and endeavour to be his substitute. My father is a forlorn and stricken man. He has no one but me to look to; he does look to me, and I will not fail him. He is not wealthy; the Begum's riches—Mrs. Jervis's fortune (minus a certain annuity)—is strictly reserved for her next of kin, Fernandez Cardozo. He is not a bad sort, and has been looking after my father and his affairs,—in short, fulfilling my duty; but I shall relieve him of all this, and remain out here as long as my father lives. I am afraid that at first you will think I am treating you badly and ungratefully; but this I know, that were you in my place, you would do the same yourself. Of course I forfeit all claim on you by such a step as I am about to take, and it is a step which has cost a struggle. I am going to lead a different life to that to which I have been brought up. I shall be isolated and out of the world, for I can never leave my father even for a day; once I take up my post I shall stick to it.

"I have found your letter here awaiting me,—your letter about Miss Gordon. Of course that is all at an end now. As for her not being good enough for me, it is the other way about. She is the only girl I ever cared for. I shall never marry now, but will adopt the

profession I chose as a child, and live and die a bachelor. I wonder that I can joke, for I need hardly tell you that I am not in a merry mood. I feel as if everything had gone from me at one blow, and I am left face to face with a new life and an inflexible duty. Whatever you may think of me, Uncle Dan, my feelings towards you will never change. I shall always think of you with affection and gratitude.

"Clarence came back to-day from Simla. I have not seen him as yet. I only arrived a couple of hours ago, to collect my kit, dismiss my servants, and say good-bye to Miss Gordon. If you had ever seen her, and spoken to her, you would not have written that suggestion about a pony or a brooch. I go back to Hawal-Ghât to-morrow. My lot is not likely to be a very bright one; do not make it harder, Uncle Dan, by being implacable. I know that at first you will feel certain that you never can forgive me; but you will by-and-bye. Write to me, and send me papers to care of Mr. Jones, Hawal-Ghât, *via* Shirani. You may as well take my name off the clubs, sell the horses down at the farm, and tell Windover not to put the drag in hand.

"Your affectionate nephew,

"M. JERVIS."

This letter, hastily written and with numerous erasures, the writer did not trust himself to read over, but thrust it into an envelope, addressed and despatched it on the spot, as if he almost feared that he might be tempted to recall it and change his mind.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"OSMAN'S SUBSTITUTE."

"HULLO, Mark!" cried his travelling companion, with cordial, outstretched hands. "So you are back? I only arrived this morning, came straight through from Simla. What's the matter, eh? You seem rather choop."

"Oh, I'll tell you presently. Let us have your news first."

"On the principle of keeping the best for the last, eh? for mine is *bad*. Well, as for news," removing his cap and sitting down, "I suppose you have heard that our secret is now public property,—that blatant ass, little Binka, had it all over Simla. What business had *he* to thrust himself into our private affairs?"

"It was never what you would call private," rejoined Mark, who was leaning against the end of a real old-fashioned hill sofa, with his hands in his pockets. "I am only surprised that it never came out before."

"Yes, now that you mention it, so am I! We had a good many fellow-passengers, but they none of them came up this way,—they were mostly for Burmah, or Madras, or globe-trotters. I could not give the name of one of them if I got a thousand pounds. There is nothing one forgets so soon as a fellow-passenger. Of course you have been to see your governor?"

"Yes. I've been away nearly a fortnight."

"And how did you find him?"

"I am sorry to say very broken down,—ill and desolate."

"But with sacks of gold mohurs all round the rooms, and chandeliers of real diamonds. I hope you have some in your pockets?" said Clarence gaily.

"No. He is a comparatively poor man,—at least he has just enough to live upon,—an annuity. The bulk of his fortune goes, as it ought to go, to the Cardozo family."

"Well, one fortune is enough for you," rejoined Clarence. "I came up post-haste. I rode your bay pony in the last ten miles, and, by Jove! I thought I had killed him; it was frightfully hot, and I put on the paces. I gave him a whole bottle of whisky when I got in."

"A whole bottle! Well, I hope you will give him some soda-water to-morrow morning. What a head the poor brute will have!" he added, with a wintry smile. "But

what was the reason for such desperate riding? Has Miss Potter come back?"

"Miss Potter be hanged!" was the reply. "I came up as hard as I could lay leg to the ground to get you to help me out of an awful hole,—an infernal money muddle."

"To help you again! I thought that five hundred pounds would put you straight."

"Good heavens, man! it's not hundreds, but thousands, that would do that!" cried the prodigal.

Mark ceased to lounge, and now assumed a more uncompromising attitude.

"Explain," he said laconically.

"Yes, I've been going it, my boy," admitted Waring, with a reckless laugh; "old faces, old places, were too much for me, and I dropped a pot of money. There was a fellow from New Orleans, a long-headed chap, a born gambler, and a wild-looking Hungarian count; they carried too many guns for me. One night we had three thousand pounds on the turn of a card. Ah, that is living! There is excitement, if you like! Better twenty hours of Simla than a cycle of Shirani."

"Nevertheless you have returned to Shirani?"

"Yes, only because I am cleared out," was the absolutely unabashed reply.

"I'm sorry to hear it, Clarence; but it is not in my power to help you beyond the five hundred pounds that will pay our expenses here. The table was papered with bills when I came back."

"Oh, those!" with a gesture of scorn, "rubbishy little shoeing accounts, stable accounts, and rent. I don't mind *them*, it's others. I'm really in an awful hat this time, and no mistake, and you must assist me."

"I cannot."

"I tell you again that you *must*," cried Waring, throwing himself back in his chair with an energy that made that venerable piece of furniture creak most piteously.

"There is no 'must' in the matter," retorted the other, steadily, "and if I were in the humour for joking, which I am not, the comic side of the situation would make me laugh. You were sent out by Uncle Dan as my mentor, to keep me straight, to give me the benefit of your experience, and to show me round. Wasn't that the arrangement? But, by Jove," suddenly springing up and beginning to pace the room, "I have been lugging you out of scrapes ever since we landed in the country."

"It is a true bill, oh, wise, cool-headed, and most virtuous Saint Mark! This I most solemnly swear to you is my last and worst scrape. Get me a cheque for a certain sum, wire to the uncle to lodge it at the agents, and I'll be a truly reformed character, and never touch another card, for ever and ever, amen."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards we will reward the old man, and rejoice his heart by packing up and going home by the next steamer. He would give many thousand pounds to get you back again, you are the apple of his little pig's eye. This country does not agree with me; I don't mean physically, but morally. It's an enervating, corrupting, beguiling land. We will sell off your guns and ponies, dear boy. I've put them up at the club. I hope I have not broken the wind of that dark bay. We will go down in the mail tonga this day week, en route for Bombay. There are temptations for you in this Indian Empire, too. The sooner you say good-bye to H. G. the better. Now, there is my programme for you,—my new leaf. What have you to say to it?"

Briak and confident as his speech had been, there was a certain unmistakable lameness in its conclusion. Waring had secretly winced under his listener's eyes,—his listener, who sat motionless, contemplating him with an expression of cool contempt.

"The first thing I have to say is, that my guns and

the ponies are not for sale, or only the chestnut with the white legs."

"Great Soot! You don't mean to tell me that you intend to take three ponies home! And what do you want with an express rifle and an elephant gun in England?"

"I may require them out here. I am not going back to England!"

Captain Waring sat suddenly erect.

"Of course this is all humbug and rot," he exclaimed vehemently.

"No. I am quite in earnest. I intend to remain with my father. It is the right thing for me to do. He is alone in the world; his mind is weak."

"So is his son's, I should say," burst out Waring, throwing his cigarette into the verandah. "Get him a keeper, two keepers, by all means, a baby house, a barrel organ, every comfort, but don't you be a lunatic. Come home with me. Think of Uncle Dan."

"Yea, I know very well that Uncle Dan will cast me off; he told me he would if I remained out here with my father."

"Cast you off!" almost screamed the other. "Do you mean to tell me that you will never see the colour of his money again?"

"Never."

"I believe that Miss Gordon has something to say to this scheme, as well as this mad quixotic idea about your father," cried Clarence, crimson with excitement. "As for the girl, you must let her slide, we have all been through that; but, for God's sake, hang on to the uncle and the coin. You are the only mortal for whom he will open his purse-strings."

"I have written to him, and told him that I am not going home."

"Is the letter posted?"

Mark nodded.



"Then," turning on him fiercely, "you have burnt your boats."

"I have."

"You are mad to chuck everything at twenty-six years of age. You give up your life at home——"

"I know best what I am giving up," interrupted his companion impatiently. "I know that I am going back to Hawal-Ghât to-morrow. There is nothing to be gained by remaining on here, and Cardozo is staying with my father till I relieve him. I am winding up my affairs, and paying off my servants, except Jan Mahomed and his son, who are coming with me, and to-morrow I turn my back upon Shirani."

"Short, sharp, and decisive is the word," sneered Waring with bitter emphasis. "Have you got over your good-byes yet?" he added with pitiless significance.

"No," becoming rather white, "not yet."

"I was told at the club that you were engaged to her. Is *she* to form part of the new scheme? Will marrying her also come under the head of the 'right thing to do'? Eh?"

"You may spare your gibes," said Jervis sternly. "Miss Gordon is absolutely free. As for myself—I shall never marry."

"Oh, ho!" with a derisive laugh, "never is a long word. Well, to descend to more prosaic matters, what about these Shirani bills and that five hundred?"

"You shall have it, of course."

"Yes, you are a man of your word, even if it is a question of a thrashing. I'll never forget the day that the cad who was ill-using a horse on the towing path riled you and taunted you; he got hold of the wrong man that time, and no mistake, poor beggar. He never guessed how you could use your fists. You looked so slim and genteel; but you left him with two lovely black eyes."

Mark made a gesture of protest. Time was precious. What was the use of raking up irrelevant old stories?

"Can't you draw upon the uncle for a couple of thousand, at least?" urged Waring, after a considerable silence. "It will be no more to him than a couple of pence, and will save me from—from——"

"What?" asked his companion, quietly.

"From," avoiding his penetrating eye, "a lot of bother and worry."

"I cannot draw on him now for a penny beyond the five hundred; but I am sure he will help you when you see him. How soon are you going home?"

"In a week. Hullo!" starting up, "there is the mess bugle. Are you coming over to dinner?"

"No. Tell the mess sergeant to send me something."

"Any champagne? I'd recommend a bottle of the pink wine of France. You are bound to see things more *couleur de rose*."

Jervis shook his head with an air of impatient negation.

"Well, I must go and change; but I'll look you up again, of course, before you turn in."

Clarence proved as good as his word; besides, he had as yet to receive a certain sum of money. He duly appeared about eleven o'clock, unusually flushed, and in a state of boisterous good humour. He found his former comrade still sitting at their joint writing-table, scribbling notes and servants' chits.

"You look as if you were making out your last will and testament. Writing your own obituary notice, eh, old chappie?" slapping him familiarly on the back. "In one sense you are committing suicide, and burying yourself alive. I've sold your chestnut pony and got the cheque,—two fifty rupees,—dirt cheap."

"It will go towards paying off some of these," said Mark, nodding at the bills.

"Oh, a mere drop in the ocean," rejoined Clarence, with easy scorn. "However, we can't have our cake and eat it," ignoring the fact that it was he who had devoured not only his own cake, but the other man's as well.

"Here is the cheque for five hundred pounds," said Mark, producing his cheque-book. "I told Uncle Dan I was going to draw it some time ago, so it will be all right," writing rapidly and handing it over. "It will clear all bills here,—mess, rent, and shops; or," still retaining it, "shall I keep it and pay them? I can send the money by post."

Waring glanced at the slip of paper held towards him. His eyes blazed with a curious light; his voice was husky as he eagerly answered, "No, no; you may rely on me. I'll be paymaster to the very end of the chapter," and he seized upon the cheque somewhat precipitately.

"And you will not make any other use of it than paying off our joint debts? You will promise me that, Clarence?" speaking with an air of cool authority. "On your honour, Waring?"

"On my word and honour. What do you take me for, old man? I'll get it cashed at the treasury here, pay all the bills like a gentleman, and send you the receipts. I hope that will please you?"

"Yes, that will do, of course; and mind you settle them at once."

"I hear old Double Gloster and Miss Paskie are engaged," said Clarence, hastily changing the subject.

"Are they?" indifferently. What was Shirani news to him now?

"And there is not a road in India wide enough for Aunt Ida. Well, Mark, I am sorry you are so head-strong. You were always a bit hard in the mouth, though you never kicked over the traces. You've been

a brick, I must say. What time are you off to-morrow?"

"About seven o'clock."

"Then I think I'll say good-night. You look pretty fagged, and you had better turn in. This," nodding, "is not good-bye; I'll make a point of seeing you in the morning."

Nevertheless, Mark stood erect, and held out his hand in silence.

How pale he looked; how worn and haggard he had become! Clarence intuitively felt that this was their last interview; something indefinable assured him that they would never again stand face to face.

He was conscious of an extraordinary mixture of regret and relief. Jervis had represented a sort of conscience. His example, his disagreeably rigorous standard of honour, his steady eyes, had shamed him from doing many things that he ought not to have done. Mark was a young saint, a hero; yea, Miss Valpy was right, he had the face of one. It was the act of a hero to renounce the world, wealth, and love,—occasionally synonymous with the flesh and the devil,—and devote his life to a crazy old man. He was a cool, reliable comrade, ready with tongue, arm, or rifle. It was true that he had been the means of pulling him out of several nasty scrapes, and this cheque for five hundred pounds now in his waistcoat-pocket would pull him out of the worst scrape of all.

He waited until he saw Mark go into his room and close the door, and then he slipped back to the club to play "snookers" and black pool. He was not home until three o'clock in the morning; and when he awoke about noon, and shouted for his bearer and his tea, he was informed that the "Chotah Sahib"—as the servants called Jervis—"had been gone many hours."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"GOOD-BYE FOREVER; GOOD-BYE, GOOD-BYE!"

It was about eight o'clock in the morning, and Mrs. Brande, as she put the last touches to her toilet, was certain that she heard a man's (a gentleman's) voice in the verandah. Pelham was from home; who could it be at such an hour? Some one come for "Chotah Hasree." Well, Honor would look after him. Ten minutes later she came out, flourishing in her hand a freshly-unfolded handkerchief, and gave quite a little gasp of pleasure as she recognised Mark Jervis. He was leaning against the stone pillar of the verandah, talking earnestly to her niece, and his pony was waiting at the steps.

"Why, I do declare! This is a pleasure," she cried; "a sight for sore eyes! Where have you been hiding yourself these ten days?"

But somehow her exuberant delight was instantly quenched when she caught sight of the faces of the two young people. Mark looked strangely agitated and as if he had but just recovered from some all but mortal sickness. Honor, her bright, happy Honor, was as smileless and white as death.

"I have come," said Jervis, advancing with an outstretched hand, "to say good-bye."

"Dear, dear, dear!" waving away his salute. "You have not said 'How do you do?' to me yet."

"No, I'm afraid I am very stupid to-day. I don't intend to have any secrets from you, Mrs. Brande."

"Oh, I know your secret; so does everyone," nodding. "I think you might have given us a *little* hint."

"You mean about the money; and I would have done so, only my hands were tied."

"And your cunning cousin never let on."

"No, but that is not what I have to tell you——"

"Then come into the drawing-room and sit down like a Christian, and send the pony round."

He shook his head emphatically as he said, "I can only wait a short time. I am going off now to a place forty miles away to live with my father."

"Your father?" she repeated, incredulously.

"Yes; my uncle adopted me when my father married again. My father is Major Jervis; he has lived in these hills for some years. I never knew his whereabouts until recently. The night of the ball he sent for me; he believed that he was dying, and I went off at once. I found him very ill, quite alone, and desolate. I am going to keep him company for the rest of his days. You see, he has no one in the world belonging to him but me."

"Well, I declare!" said Mrs. Brande, after a pause. "It is awfully good of you, that I will say; but if you are your uncle's adopted son, how will *he* take it?"

"Badly, I am afraid, but I cannot be in two places; my uncle has a wife, and heaps of friends, and money, and first-rate health."

"Make your father come in to Shirani; we will put him up; and why not get him to go home?"

"It would be of no use to urge him to either step; he is a fixture in his present home for as long as he lives."

"Well, at least you will often come in and see us; you are not a fixture!" she urged, eagerly.

"Mrs. Brande, you are very good,—I shall never forget all your kindness to me,—but, as far as I can see, I shall never come back to Shirani again. My father could not spare me, for one thing, and for another"—and there was a ring of passion in his voice as he added—"I could not endure it. Think of me as companion to an invalid, with every moment occupied," and here his words sounded a little husky. "Do not tempt me."



"Oh, Mark, my boy, I am so sorry!" she exclaimed. "To think that this is good-bye,—that we shall not see you again."

Mark told himself that this so-called underbred, vulgar woman had accepted the news of the shattering of her niece's fortune in a manner that no duchess could have surpassed. Apparently it was not the loss of position, of thousands a year, that had cut her up. She had stood that with marvellous stoicism, it was the loss of Mark himself!

"You know, of course, what my hopes were," he said, glancing towards Honor, who stood at the far end of the verandah, gazing out at—what? "There is an end to them now. Some explanation is due to you and Mr. Brande, and I will write. She need never know *all*. Let people in Shirani suppose what they please, as long as it does not reflect on *her*. Our engagement was never given out; it was a mere matter of hours. My father is peculiar; he wishes to keep his name and existence a secret; you will understand all—later on."

"I remember him well," said Mrs. Brande; "such a handsome fellow, and so fond of society, and so popular. His second wife,—I have seen her—a dark person, with — Well, she is dead; let her rest. Oh, Mark, I suppose this must be. But is there not some way out of this trouble?—some loop-hole, some alternative? Surely you would not sacrifice my poor Honor and yourself for nothing?" and her still pretty blue eyes swam in tears.

"No, Mrs. Brande; you may rely on me in that. To hold to Honor—I give up Honor. May she come as far as the gate with me?"

"Yes, she may, to be sure."

"And give me something,—you have no photograph. I know—just to show that we part friends?" and he looked at her appealingly.

Mrs. Brande, who had been crying, deliberately wiped

her eyes, and threw both her arms round his neck and kissed him. It was no mere playful threat this time. The dirzee, who had just arrived, and was slowly unfolding his mat, could hardly believe his senses. He told the scandal in the bazaar that evening, and was laughed to scorn for his pains.

The young couple, closely followed by Syce and pony, walked slowly to the gate,—aye, and up the road.

"I little thought how I should next see you, and what I should have to tell you, when we last parted at this very gate," he said at last.

"You are giving up a fortune and great prospects, I know, Mark, because you find your duty lies out here; you are giving up the world and going into banishment. But, Mark, I prepare you that I am going to say something"—with a catch of her breath—"that may lower me in your eyes; still I will venture. Surely you need not give up *me*? Please," speaking forcibly, "hear my reasons. I am accustomed to a very quiet life at home. I was brought up in poverty; I shall make a capital poor man's wife. You say your father's affairs are in a fearful muddle, and that he has but an annuity. I can nurse him, read to him, walk out with him, and amuse him. I will be very good to your father. I don't want society, or new dresses, or anything, or anyone—but you, Mark. I know that I am shamefully bold and unmaidenly,—it would kill Mrs. Grundy to hear me,—but I believe you think that I shall mind your dull, lonely jungle life; that I shrink from poverty. You are quite mistaken; I shall enjoy it with you. Do not say 'No,' Mark, even if we must wait. I am ready to wait—ten, twenty years,—thirty years," concluded this reckless young woman.

She was waiting now for his answer, white and trembling from the force of her own emotion.

"Honor, I know you will pity me," he began at last,

"pity me, when I tell you that I must say 'No.' I must face this life alone. God bless you, and give you a double share of happiness,—your own, and what might have been mine. I have lately learnt something," and his pale face grew ashy grey, "that will prevent my ever calling any woman 'wife.' The sacrifice I am about to make is bitter; yea, bitter as death. I am not going to sacrifice you; you must forget me, darling. You have all your young life before you; put me out of your mind—gradually, sorrowfully, tenderly—as if I was dead."

"I shall never do that, Mark. Tell me; may I write to you?"

"No!" was the most unexpected and chilling reply.

"But yea, as your sister?" she pleaded, boldly.

He shook his head.

"I could never come to think of you as my sister."

"At least you will give me your address? Once, we were to have spent our lives together; now, I may not even know where I am to think of you as spending yours."

"You had much better not think of me at all," he answered, with a tremor in his voice.

"I must and I shall! Be quick and tell me."

"My father calls himself Mr. Jones; he lives beyond Hawal-Ghât, about forty miles away, and I must be with him before dark. By the bye, I have kept your fan; it may seem an odd notion, but you will understand. And now I must go."

Hearing the sound of clattering hoofs and gay, laughing voices rapidly approaching, he held her hand in his but for one second, and dropped it. Then the Syce hurrying forward with the pony, he mounted and galloped off. No—he never looked back.

Honor stood for a moment as in a sort of trance; then she turned and leaned against the palings which bordered a pine forest sloping to the road. The gay riding party

cantering past rather wondered to see Miss Gordon without her hat, evidently looking for something in the wood. They had no time to stop and ask her what it was that she had lost.

They would have been rather astonished if they could have learnt the truth—that she had just that moment lost her lover, and forever. They might have guessed at a tragedy of the kind had they seen her white, set face, and the expression of the clenched hands that grasped the palings. But they did not see, nor did they suspect any connection between Miss Gordon looking into a wood and a momentary vision of a young fellow on a bay pony, who had flashed up a side path before they could identify either man or beast.

Honor, with a perfectly colourless face, walked up to her aunt, who was still softly sobbing in the drawing-room, and leaning her hand upon her shoulder, said in a strange, emotionless voice,—

"It is all over, auntie. We have said good-bye forever."

She stooped and kissed her, and went and shut herself up in her own room, from which she did not emerge for several hours, and then the girl who did appear was a different Honor Gordon.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE SON AND THE HEIR.

"I NEVER expected to see you again," cried Fernandez, as with a napkin over his arm and a lamp held above his round black head, he surveyed Jervis, who was stiffly dismounting from his pony.

"Why not?" enquired the traveller, as he came up the steps.

"Every why not, my dear fellow. If I had been in your shoes, you'd never have seen me again. I'd have taken my *jawab*. You are a young man in a thousand." And he patted him affectionately on the shoulder.

"Not at all"—following him into the dining-room, where the remains of an excellent repast were on the table—"I'm simply a young man of my word."

Fernandes may have belied himself, but the chances were that his own estimate of his character was correct. There is much in heredity! He came of an easy-going, voluptuous, volatile stock, as his soft fat face, loose mouth, and merry but unsteady eye indicated. His companion was descended from another and stronger nation; his character was cast in a sterner mould; he was the scion of a race of soldiers, who had fought, suffered, and died for a cause. Jervis's square jaw, resolute glance, and firmly cut thin lips, told a tale of where the flesh had warred against the spirit and had not prevailed.

"How is my father?" he asked, ere he seated himself.

"Perfectly well—that is, his mind. He has been looking for you all day with the spy-glass. He was tired and went to bed early. He said he knew you would be here by morning. If you *had* deserted him, I don't know how it would have been"—touching his forehead significantly.

Fernandes gesticulated incessantly with a pair of small, plump, delicately shaped hands, on which flashed rings of great value, and of which he was equally proud.

He played the part of host to the son of the house, anxiously pressed him to eat dainties and drink champagne, and was exceedingly loquacious and confidential. The pale and worn-looking traveller ate but little, and supported his share of conversation by monosyllables

whilst Mr. Cardozo discoursed volubly of his late cousin, and threw a somewhat lurid light upon her married life.

"Oh yea, Mercedes was very generous and hospitable, and not bad looking—no, when she did not disfigure herself with a mask of pearl powder; but she was frightfully extravagant, as intriguing as her grandmother, and as jealous as"—immediate words failed him for a simile, and after a considerable pause, he added—"the devil. No, the poor major had his own troubles. He might not speak to another woman; he was handsome and popular, and had a taking manner; he could not help that. But she made some awful scenes."

"Did she?" returned Jervis, with the provoking indifference of a young man to whom domestic "scenes" are merely a figure of speech.

"Yes, there is a great deal to be said in favour of the zenana system," continued Fernandes, solemnly. "There are no open scandals, no hysterics at balls, no slapping of other ladies at dinner-parties, no making a man look small before his comrades. Mercedes took good care never to look small herself. She always rented the biggest bungalow in a station, and had it coloured outside to suit her taste—it was generally pink and white, like a Christmas cake. She kept open house and about fifty servants. She liked to sit behind four spanking horses—the major was a capital whip. And as to her diamonds, why she blazed like a Catherine-wheel. She left all the jewels to the major for life, as a mockery, for they are no use to him, he cannot sell a stone; but I can, and will, by-and-by. The native jewels are worth lakhs. Most of them are in the bank at Calcutta; but there are a few here in a safe—jewelled daggers, horse pistols, gold battle-axes, betel-boxes. There is one emerald and ruby necklace, with pearl tassels, that is worth fifty thousand rupees, and a sirpesh,

or forehead ornament, set with huge rubies, said to have belonged to Ahmed, the last native conqueror of India."

These descriptions were rolling off Fernandes' fluent tongue, when it occurred to him that he was speaking to deaf ears. What would rouse this odd, abstracted young man—the mention of money?

"The jewels, I see, do not interest you," he exclaimed; "but I must tell you something about your father's income."

The abstracted young man turned a pair of steady eyes on the descendant of a Portuguese free lance and nodded assent.

"Mercedes made her will in a tantrum; she had made and revoked dozens. However, as she was suddenly cut off, this one had to stand. She left me, her sole heir, a fine present income—*everything* at your father's death. He has a thousand pounds a year as long as he lives, or until he marries, and up till now the money is thrown away and wasted; it goes to blood-suckers and hangers-on in hundreds—to every one but the owner. When he has one of his bad attacks, he will draw a cheque for the asking. Unprincipled tradespeople have sent in accounts for articles that have never come here. There are, however, four hundred military saddles in one of the lumber-rooms, and about nine hundred pairs of long jack-boots. He raises a regiment, you see, when he is not in one of his melancholy fits. A great deal of money sticks to Fuzzil's greasy palms."

"So I should suppose; but that is over."

"There is a leper village chiefly supported by the major in his lucid intervals. The beggars and lepers assemble on Sunday for their alms. It is a great charity."

"Yes; which is more than we can say for Fuzzil"—with a mechanical smile.

"Well, I am off to-morrow; my wife is expecting me," continued Cardoso, briskly.

"Then you are married!" exclaimed the other, with unqualified surprise.

"No, I don't look it, do I? But I married when I was eighteen—the more fool I!—a pretty little girl you could almost blow away. Yes; and now she weighs sixteen stone. She has very bad health, and seldom goes out, though I keep a fine carriage and horses for her. She does not care for anything much, as long as she has her priest, her doctor, her woman cronies, who tell her all the gossip, and her coffee. Oh, she is very particular about her coffee. She is not fond of clothes, or jewellery, or show; indeed, poor woman, she is too unwieldy to dress and go about. Now I am a society man;" and he threw himself back with a smile of extravagant superiority. "I go round looking after the property, I run up to Missouri often, I have plenty of friends. I do a little betting, I play billiards, I am passionately fond of dancing. I appreciate a good dinner and a pretty woman,—and pretty women appreciate me. Oh yes!"

He half closed his eyes, and puffed and blinked alternately with an air of ineffable content. It was all that his *vis-à-vis* could do to keep his countenance; indeed, he was not entirely successful.

"Oh, you may laugh!" exclaimed Mr. Cardoso, with perfect good humour. "Other men laugh, too; but I win—I walk in," he concluded, with an air of superb complacency.

Mark gazed dispassionately at his little stout, sleek companion. He was fat and forty, effeminate and vain; but then he was wealthy and good-natured. Were these the traits that appeal most strongly to women-kind?

"I am a great ladies' man, I do assure you. I could show you letters——"

Jervis made a gesture of frantic dissent.

"Bah, bah, bah! Why you know very well you've had fifty love affairs *yourself*."

"If I had I should keep them to myself."

"That's a snub," with a roar of laughter. "And you *would*; you are a close sort of fellow, I should say. Now, I am not; I like talking about my experiences."

"With Mrs. Cardozo, of course."

"Mrs. Cardozo knows there is no harm in *me*; but I must have my own friends, just as she has hers." And he stretched out his arm and amorously contemplated a slender gold bangle. "I suppose"—with a self-conscious smile—"you don't possess one?"

"Great aunt! I should think not. Do you wear a necklace, too?"

Mr. Cardozo, who was certainly the soul of good humour, burst into another roar of laughter; and Fuzzil, who was listening at the door, reported that "the Kala Sahib and the other were talking like brothers."

"Well, well; enjoy life while you may—that's my motto." And he drank off a bumper of Madeira and smacked his lips audibly. "You need not be shocked; I shall take the best care of Maria as long as she lives, and when she dies I shall marry again—probably a young girl."

Mark offered no comment, none being required.

"Yes, I enjoy life, And you; what will you do here? Wait"—with a dramatic gesture—"I will answer my own question. Either this"—holding a glass to his lips—"or this"—drawing his hand significantly across his throat.

"Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do."

"My hands will be full," rejoined the other resolutely. "I intend to work great reforms. I shall manage the

domestic budget; I shall get rid of Fuzzil and his clan."

"Ho, ho, ho! you will just as easily get rid of the sun, moon, and stars. He is a fixture; he has been here for years. His brother is khitmatghar; his father is cook; his uncle is dhobie. Oh, Fuzzil has struck in his roots; he knows when he is well off."

"And I know when we are *not* well off. He is a gambling, drunken, insolent ruffian. Rooted, you say! I shall turn him out, root and branch."

"You will be very strong if you do that," rejoined Fernandez, looking between his eyelashes at the spare, stern-faced young man across the table, who continued.

"I will depend on you to send me up a decent cook. I shall put my bearer at the head of the staff; his son will attend my father."

"They will rob you, of course," remarked Cardozo, with a shrug.

"I doubt it. But if they do, it will be in a quiet and respectable manner—not indecently and extravagantly—and to no great extent. The money will pass through my hands. The mallees must learn that they will no longer receive a garden rent free, and wages for working for themselves. We will have some new furniture, the house cleaned and routed out, a daily *dák*, papers, books, a pony for my father."

"You will never do all this—never. I wish you every success, you know"—nodding towards him—"but the labours of Hercules, the cleaning of the Augean stables, were a mere joke to your task. Come, now, I'm a sporting fellow; I bet you fifty rupees to twenty, that when I come back in a couple of months' time, just to see if you are alive, I shall find our friend Fuzzil and the goats, old hags, children, and chickens, *in statu quo*."

Jervis shook his head; he was not in the mood to bet.

or joke. Life was real, life was earnest—grim earnest, with him now.

"Well, ta-ta! it is nearly twelve o'clock, and I have to make an early start," said Mr. Cardozo, rising, and with a yawn that seemed to divide his head in two parts, he waved a valediction with his pet hand and ring, and swaggered off to bed.

But Mark Jervis was of stronger stuff than flabby, emotional, self-indulgent Fernandez; and after a desperate struggle he carried out his plans. The desperate struggle being on the part of his father's good-for-nothing retinue. When in one brief sentence he informed Fuzzil that he no longer required his services, Fuzzil looked as if he could not credit his ears. He blew out his fat cheeks and struck an attitude of defiance, as with folded arms and head on one side he said—

"You not my master. I take no orders."

"I am your master now," said Jervis.

"I never going. This Mr. Cardozo's house."

"Indeed! I think he would be surprised to hear that; and you will find that you are mistaken. You have made a very good business out of this situation. Your time is up, and you clear out to-morrow."

Mahomed, the bearer, and his following arrived, and a grand transformation scene ensued. Some old women in the compound and stabling had to be carried out bodily, shrieking vociferously, with their beds and cooking things and other luggage—the collection of years of thieving—like so many magpies' nests. Fuzzil himself had also to be assisted off the premises, being extremely drunk, his turban askew, and uttering wild cries of vengeance, with spluttering, foaming mouth. And then the new régime came into working order. The house underwent a consolidated spring cleaning; sun and air were admitted to dusty old locked-up rooms,—rooms that offered many surprises in the shape of their contents; a

mixture of the properties of East and West—old howdahs and silver horse-trappings, rusty swords and spears, images of saints, holy water stands, crucifixes, pictures, tulwars, bonnets, betel-nut boxes, hookahs, armour. It was, in fact, a combination of a native "tosha-khana," or wardrobe room—an oratory and a pawnbroker's shop.

Dust and dirt and cobwebs were swept out, as well as goats and kids and poultry. House linen, glass and crockery and carpets were replaced—money and the telegraph wires can do great things—walls were white-washed, windows cleaned, jungle cut down. Thus was order and energy infused into every department. The "Pela Kothi," though shabby, was clean and cheerful. The meals were good, and served by snowy-clad servants; flowers and fruit were actually to be seen on the table. There was a daily post, books, magazines, and a steady hill pony to carry Major Jervis. But he preferred to hobble on his son's arm a hundred times up and down the terrace, talking of old times, and noting each turn with a bean. He was a different man already, roused at any rate for the moment from his stupor; he took an interest in the news of the day, in the garden, and, above all, in his pensioners the lepers.

The young reformer, who had been the means of all these changes, had worked hard, worked ceaselessly from morning till night. He felt that incessant occupation was his only refuge; he dared not give himself time to think. He walked over the hills of an afternoon when his day's work was done, walked until he was so completely worn out that he was safe to sleep like a log, and, above all, safe from what he most dreaded—dreams.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE VOICE IN THE CONDEMNED CANTONMENT.

THE condemned cantonment had an extraordinary fascination for Mark Jervis, and he frequently made a considerable *détour* in order to return home by the path that led through this beautiful but melancholy spot. The world had abandoned it for a good reason—he had abandoned the world for a good reason, they had something in common in their isolation. He was familiar with the barracks, the mess-house, the ruinous bungalows, their wild tangled gardens, where flower and tree fought desperately against extinction by savage cousins and distant wild relations. Apple and rose trees still managed to hold their own, but heliotrope and geraniums had long succumbed. The churchyard was his constant haunt; he knew the names and short histories on the grave-stones, head-stones, crosses, and not a few immense square tombs, such as appear to be peculiar to old Indian cemeteries. It was as if a small house, or mortuary chapel, had been reared over the departed, and the more sincerely mourned, the larger loomed these great dark weather-stained erections! There was a big and stately edifice dedicated to the memory of Constance Herbert, aged nineteen. What had poor Constance done to deserve to be weighted down with so many tons of masonry? The inscription was effaced. There was another sarcophagus erected over the remains of a man who was killed by a fall from a precipice; and a tomb the size of an ordinary gate lodge was raised to the memory of an infant aged eighteen months.

One evening Mark descended the hill after a long and very erratic tramp; it was the hour of sunset; he stood for a few moments a captive to the influence of his surroundings—the bluish hills, the amethyst-tinted distance, the quiet smokeless bungalows, nestling among their flower-choked verandahs, the soft yellow light flooding the entire valley, the uncanny silence, a silence befitting this forsaken spot.

He sat down on the grass-grown chabootra (or bandstand) drew out and lit a cheroot. It was Sunday, and he instinctively glanced over at the roofless church. What had been the last service held between its walls? A service for the burial of the dead, no doubt—the long-forgotten dead who were buried in the precincts. As he sat there alone in the midst of dumb witnesses of the past, his mind travelled back over his whole life, and he steadily reviewed its most memorable incidents one by one; the most noteworthy of all had befallen him in these very mountains. His thoughts dwelt on his uncle, then on Honor Gordon. What was she doing just now? Perhaps she was sitting in church, listening attentively to one of Mr. Paul's brief and excellent sermons. Had her thoughts or prayers ever strayed to him? Was it true what Miss Paake had said about woman's thoughts? Could he honestly tell his own heart that he hoped Honor Gordon had forgotten him? Would he prefer to be what the Bible terms "A dead man, out of mind"?

The sun had drawn away his bright warm cloak foot by foot, the grey pall of a short Indian twilight was rapidly spreading over the valley. Shadows advanced stealthily and momentarily, the woods were inscrutable, and the first cry of the jackal rose through the sharp hill air.

Jervis had risen already to depart, when his attention was arrested by an unexpected sound—no jackal this, it

was a voice, a human voice—coming from the direction of the church or churchyard. He almost held his breath to listen, and this is what he heard, in what had been once a full rich contralto. Every syllable was distinctly audible, and there was a slight almost imperceptible pause between each word—

"Oh, where shall rest be found?
Rest for the weary soul,
'Twere vain the ocean's depths to sound
Or pierce to either pole."

There was a silence of a full minute, during which the young man's heart thumped loudly against his ribs. Was he listening to the voice of one risen from the grave?

Then the weird singing recommenced, with a wail of passionate despair in the notes—

"The world can never give
The bliss for which we sigh,
'Tis not the whole of life to live
Nor all of death to die."

He waited for a considerable time in a fever of thrilling expectancy, but there was no more. Having made certain of this, his next move was to acquaint himself with the personality of the performer. He ran over to the ruins of the church, climbed in across a pile of broken masonry—the small square enclosure was easily measured at one glance—it was empty.

Then he walked slowly round, and examined the walls by the dying light. No, his quest was vain, there was not a soul—undoubtedly it had been a soul—to be seen. In the gathering darkness the now silent valley had grown very sombre, the trees made awful shadows, and the forest seemed to stretch away up the mountains until it was lost in the dusky sky.

* * * * *

"In what direction did you ride to-day, Mark?" inquired his father as they sat over their dessert.

"I cannot tell you precisely, sir; but I came home by the cantonment."

"A lovely spot; the authorities could not have chosen better, if they had searched five hundred miles—good air, good water, good aspect; and yet the last regiment died there like flies. The natives say it is an accursed place, and not a man of them will go near it after sundown."

"I suppose you don't believe in that sort of thing, sir; you are not superstitious?"

"Not I," indignantly. "Mercedes was superstitious enough for fifty; she had all the native superstitions at her finger-ends, and the European ones to boot! There was very little scope left between the two! Almost everything you said, or did, or saw, or wore, was bound to have a meaning, or to be an omen, or to bring bad luck. I remember she was reluctant to start from Missouri the day she met her death, simply because she found a porcupine's quill upon the doorstep! I have seen some queer things in my day," continued Major Jervis. "When we were quartered at Amercoo I got a fright that I did not recover from for months. I had lost my way out pig-sticking, and was coming back alone, pretty late. At one part of the road I had to pass a large irregular strip of water, and there standing upright in the middle of it was actually a *skeleton*, swaying slowly to and fro; I shall never forget that blood-curdling sight,—and I don't know how I got home to this very day."

"And how was it accounted for?"

"By perfectly natural causes, of course! Cholera had broken out at a village close to where I saw the spectre, and the people had died in such numbers that there was no time for the usual funeral pyre. It was as much as those spared could do to bring the corpses to the spot,

tie a gurrah (those large water vessels) to head and feet, fill them with water, push the body out, and then turn and fly almost before it could sink out of sight. My ghost was one of these bodies. The gurrah from the head had broken away, and that at the feet had pulled the corpse into an upright position, and there it was, a spectacle to turn a man's brain! We were quartered at Ameroo for four years, and I never passed that miserable spot without a shudder. When I last saw it, the water lay low, covered with the usual reddish-looking Indian water-weed; down by the edge was a skull blackening in the sun. That hideous pool was the grave of two hundred people."

"And so your ghost was accounted for and explained away," said Mark. "Did you ever come across anything, in all your years out here, that could not be accounted for or explained away?"

"Yes, I did; a queer, senseless, insignificant little fact, as stubborn as the rest of its tribe. One morning many years ago I was out pigeon-shooting with some fellows, and we came upon a large peepul tree, among the branches of which waved sundry dirty little red-and-white flags, and under its shade was a chabootra, about fifteen feet square, and raised three feet off the ground. Mounting this, in spite of the protests of a fakir, we discovered a round hole in the centre, and looking down, we perceived filthy water, covered with most unwholesome-looking scum. The sides of the well were hollow and uneven and had a sort of petrified appearance. We asked the reason of the signs of 'poojah' we beheld, and heard the simple story of the water in the well. It never increased or decreased, no matter if the weather were hot and dry or cold and wet; no matter whether rain fell in torrents or the land was parched with drought, whether sugar-cane juice or the blood of the sacrificial goat was poured in by buckets full, or

not at all. It might be closely watched, to show that it was not regulated by human hands, and it would be seen that it never changed. Therefore it was holy. The god 'Devi' was supposed to be responsible for the curious phenomenon of the water always standing at the same level,—about four feet from the mouth of the well, and never increasing its depth—said to be thirty feet. Over and over again I revisited the spot, so did others, and we never discovered any change. That was a fact we could not explain. All the same, I do not believe in the supernatural!"

As his father did not believe in the supernatural, and was likely to be a sceptical listener, Mark resolved to keep his experience to himself; perhaps there might be a natural cause for it too.

The arrival of a visitor to the Yellow House was not lost upon the neighbourhood; several young planters flocked down to look him up, and discussed fruit crops, tea crops, and the best beats for gurool, the best rivers and lakes for mahseer, and gave him hearty invitations to their respective bungalows. The German missionary sought him out, also Mr. Burgess the American doctor and *padré*, who worked among the lepers. He, like his predecessors, had been struck with the remarkable and almost magical change that had been wrought in and around the *Pela Kothi*. He beheld his patient, Mr. Jervis, in a comfortable airy room dressed in a neat new suit, reading a recent *Pioneer* like a sane man. Like a sane man, he discussed politics, local topics, and with greater enthusiasm his son, who unfortunately was not at home. Presently an excellent tiffin was served to the visitor, he was conducted round the garden, and noted the improvements in every department; he came to the conclusion that Jervis, junior, must be a remarkable individual. He had an opportunity of judging of him personally before he left, for he rode up just as Mr.



Burgess was taking his departure, regretted that he had not arrived sooner, and calling for another pony, volunteered to accompany the reverend guest part of the way home.

A spare, resolute-looking young man and a capital rider, noted Mr. Burgess, as Mark's young pony performed a series of antics all the way down the path in front of his own sober and elderly animal.

"Your father is wonderfully better. I am his medical adviser, you know," said the missionary.

"Yes, and I wish you lived nearer than twelve miles."

"He has a wonderful constitution. He has had one stroke of paralysis, he may be taken suddenly, and he may live for the next thirty years. Is it long since you met?"

"I have not seen him till lately,—since I was a child."

"That is strange, though of course India does break up families."

"I was adopted by an uncle, and lived in London most of my time."

"Ah, I understand; and came out to visit your father."

"Yes, partly; indeed, I may say chiefly."

"And have thrown in your lot with him. Mr. Jervis, I honour you for it." Mark looked uncomfortable, and his companion added, "This life must be a great change, indeed, as it were another form of existence, to you; you must not let yourself stagnate now you have set your house in order, but come among us when you can. There are Bray and Van Zee, the two nearest planters to you, both good fellows. You have a much nearer neighbour that you will never see."

"Indeed, I am sorry to hear that. May I ask why?"

"It is one who shrinks from encountering Europeans, even holds aloof from me. Though we work in the same field, we have rarely met."

Mark would have liked to have gleaned more particu-

lars, but the burly American missionary was not disposed to be communicative, and all he could gather about his mysterious neighbour was that the individual was not a European, not a heathen, and not young.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A FRIENDLY VISIT.

CAPTAIN WARING had departed for England without ceremony or beat of drum, leaving his debts behind him, also presumably his cousin, who had not had the common decency to leave P. P. C. cards, no not even on the mess or the club, and who had treated poor Honor Gordon shamefully; indeed, several matrons agreed that in the good old days such a man would certainly have been shot or horsewhipped.

How Colonel Sladen had chuckled, surmised, and slandered, had bemoaned the girl's lost good looks, and her aunt's idiocy to all comers, as he waited impatiently for his afternoon rubber! Next to his whilst, the relaxation he most thoroughly enjoyed was a *bond fide* ill-natured gossip, with a sauce in the form of sharp and well-spiced details.

No reliable information respecting Mr. Jervis had as yet been circulated—for Clarence, on second thoughts, had kept his late comrade's plans and whereabouts entirely to himself.

Mrs. Brande knew, and held her tongue. What was the good of talking? She was much subdued in these days, even in the colour of her raiment. She rarely went to the club; she dared not face certain questioning pitiless eyes in the awful verandah; indeed she kept in the

background to an unparalleled degree. Nevertheless she had her plans, and was prepared to rise phoenix-like from the ashes of her former hopes. She was actually contemplating a second venture, in the shape of a niece. She thought Honor wanted cheering up, and a face from home—especially such a lovely face—would surely have a happy result. But Honor's thoughts were secretly fixed upon another countenance, a certain colourless, handsome face—a face she never expected to see again. Her mind dwelt with poignant memories on a pair of eyes, dim with wordless misery, that had looked into her own that hateful June morning.

"We can well afford it, P.," urged his wife, apropos of her scheme. "One girl is the same as two—one Ayah between them." She little knew Fairy.

"Please yourself," cried Mr. Brande, at last; "but Honor shall always be my niece, my chief niece, and nothing shall ever put her nose out of joint with her uncle Pelham."

"No one wants to! I should like to see any one try that, or with me either. But what a nose Fairy has! Just modelled to her face like a wax-work."

Mrs. Brande talked long and enthusiastically to Honor about her sister. But Honor was not responsive; her eyes were averted, her answers unsatisfactory; indeed, she said but little, and looked positively uncomfortable and distressed. And no doubt she felt a wee bit guilty because she had prevented the child from coming out before. But that was very unlike Honor; Mrs. Brande could not understand it.

She would exult in a niece who was a miracle of loveliness, instead of being merely a pretty, bright, and popular girl. Not that Honor was very bright now; she was losing her looks, and Honor's love affair had come to such a woeful end. Honor was not the sort of girl to take up with any one else; and, indeed, she could

not wonder. Poor Mark! of all her boys, he was the one nearest to her heart.

Still she considered that he had carried filial love a great deal too far, when she had thought over his sacrifice in moments of cool reflection. It was a shame that Mark and Honor and a magnificent fortune should all be sacrificed to an eccentric old hermit.

Mrs. Brande said little; she was not receiving the support and encouragement she expected. She placed Fairy's photograph in poor Ben's silver frame in a conspicuous place in the drawing-room, and she mentally sketched out the rough draft of another letter to Hoyle.

Before this letter took definite shape, Mrs. Langrishe came to call—a dinner "call"—in full state and her best afternoon toilet. Seating herself on the sofa, she began to tell Mrs. Brande all about her dear invalid, exactly as if she were talking to a most sympathetic listener,—instead of to a deadly rival.

"He is such a nice man, and so quiet in a house."

"For that matter," retorted Mrs. Brande, "he is quiet enough out of the house, and everywhere else."

"And he is so contented and easily amused," continued Mrs. Langrishe. "I left him with Lalla reading aloud to him."

"Do you think that is *quite* the thing?" inquired Mrs. Brande, with a dubious sniff.

"Why should she not do it as well as hospital nurses?"

Mrs. Brande reflected on the result of her own nursing. Would this nursing have the same effect?

"Hospital nurses are generally young, single, and very frequently pretty," resumed Mrs. Langrishe. "They read to their patients, and take tea with them, and no one says a word. All the difference between them and these girls is their uniform and their experience; and surely no one ever dreams of making a remark about those excellent, devoted young women!"

Lalla was not excellent, but she had certainly been most devoted, as her aunt thankfully acknowledged.

"Well, I don't know that I should allow Honor to do it," said Mrs. Brande, with a meditative air.

"Possibly not. It would, of course, depend upon circumstances. Now"—laying two fingers playfully on Mrs. Brande's round arm—"I am going to be a little bird, and whisper a little secret in your ear."

Mrs. Brande drew back as if she thought Mrs. Langrishe was going to be a little rattlesnake.

"It is not to be given out for a few days, but Lalla and Sir Gloster are engaged. It is quite settled."

Sir Gloster had only proposed the previous evening, and had begged that the fact of the engagement might be kept quiet for a week, until he had wired home to his all-important mother. She must be told before any one. Yes, he had succumbed to Lalla's bright blandishments. He was a dull, heavy man; he liked to be amused. He would have amusement all day long when Lalla was his wife. She had a charming voice, and read aloud well. She brought him all the scraps of news, she was an admirable mimic, an adroit flatterer, and altogether a charming girl; and her daily *l'le-a-l'les* were of a most stimulating character,—and he looked forward to them with keen anticipation. She gave him a capital description of the unmasking of Captain Waring, the sensation created by the *soi disant* poor relation; how every one was certain that it was going to be a match between him and Miss Gordon; how he had absconded, and Miss Gordon was left. He had evidently joined his friend in Bombay—wise young man!

Sir Gloster, who was naturally of a huffy and implacable disposition, had never recovered the shock to his affections and self-esteem. He was by no means sorry to hear that in her turn Miss Gordon had been spurned, and he meant to show her how speedily he had been consoled.

Mrs. Langrishe, when she entered Mrs. Brande's house, had not intended to divulge her great news—merely to throw out hints, draw comparisons, and trample more or less on the fallen and forsaken.

But for once human nature was too strong for her; she would have had a serious illness if she had not then and there relieved her mind of her overwhelming achievement.

Mrs. Brande opened her blue eyes to their widest extent; her worst fears were confirmed.

She however mustered up an artificial smile, and said,—

"I am sure you are very pleased," which was true—"and I am glad indeed to hear it," which was not true.

"It is to be kept quiet for a week," murmured Mrs. Langrishe; "but I am telling you as an old friend, who I feel sure will be pleased with the news. Of course we are all delighted; it is everything we could wish," and she drew herself up.

"I should rather think it was!" rejoined Mrs. Brande, tartly; she was but human after all.

"My brother and all my people will be much gratified, Sir Gloster is such a dear good fellow, and so well off, and so steady."

"I hope he won't be a little too steady for Lalla!"

"Not he; and he delights in all her fun, and singing—"

"And dancing?" suggested Mrs. Brande, significantly.

"It will not be a long engagement," ignoring this little thrust. "This is the second week of September; we shall all be going down in another six weeks. We will have the wedding in about a month."

It was on the tip of Mrs. Brande's tongue to say, "Delays are dangerous," but she closed her lips.

"Where is Honor?" inquired Mrs. Langrishe, with rare effusion.

"She has gone off down the khud to get ivy for the table. I have a small dinner this evening."

"You are always having dinners, you wonderful woman."

"Well, you see, in Pelham's position, we must entertain, and I make it a rule to have a dinner once a week."

"You are quite a providence to the station!" cried her visitor affectedly. "How pretty those grasses are. I suppose Honor arranged them? What a useful girl she is!"

"Yes, she takes all trouble off my hands. I don't know how I shall ever get on without her."

"How lucky for you that there is no chance of her leaving you! My dear, that was a most unfortunate affair about Mr. Jervis."

"What do you mean?" inquired Mrs. Brande, whose crest began to rise.

"Oh," with a disagreeable laugh, "it is what did *he* mean! He paid Honor the most devoted attention, and the moment he was revealed in his true colours—he fled. No one knows what has become of him."

"Pardon me—we do!" returned his champion, with a quiver of her double chin.

"And—where is he, dear, what is he doing?"

"He is doing a good—a noble action. Putting himself and his wishes aside for the sake of others," returned Mrs. Brande in a white heat of emotion.

"Oh well," rather disconcerted, "if you and Honor, and above all *Mr. Brande*, are satisfied, of course there is no more to be said——"

"No," pointedly. "I hope no more will be said. Have you seen the photograph of my other niece, Honor's sister?" making a desperate effort to rally and change the conversation, and reaching for the frame, which she solemnly placed in Mrs. Langrishe's hand.

"What do you think of her?" Here at least she was certain of scoring a small triumph.

"Think, my dear woman! Why, that she is perfectly lovely." (It was safe to praise a girl who was in England.)

"At first she was coming out to me," her aunt pursued, "but she changed her mind. Now we are thinking of having her out in November with the Hadfield's girl."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Langrishe, reflectively, and still nursing the picture, as it were, on her knee.

She had a wonderful knack of picking up odd bits of news, and her brain contained useful little scraps of the most promiscuous description. Her mind was a sort of rag-bag, and these scraps often came in appropriately. She rummaged out a scrap now.

She had recently heard, from a cousin of hers (an artist), of a Mrs. Gordon, a widow with two daughters, one of them lovely, who was sitting to him as Rowena—an ideal Rowena—but who was also a dwarf—a sort of little creature that you might exhibit.

"Does your niece live at Hoyle, and is her name Fairy?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?" rather eagerly.

"I have heard of her, recently, from my cousin, Oscar Crabbe. And why did she not come out?" looking at her with a queer smile.

"Her health was not very good—and there was some other reason—which I have not been told."

"I know the reason, and can tell you, if you like," said Mrs. Langrishe, with an air of affectionate confidence.

Here was an unexpected opportunity of planting a dart in her adversary's side.

"There is no object in keeping the matter secret; it is just as foolish as that scheme of young Jervis's who was

like an ostrich sticking his head in the sand. By the way, it appears that that is quite an exploded ideal! Every one in Hoyle knows Miss Fairy Gordon's appearance,—she is extraordinary lovely—but——"

"But not mad? Don't say she is mad!" protested Mrs. Brande, excitedly.

"No, no; not so bad as that. But," looking steadily into her listener's eyes, she added, "poor little creature, she is a dwarf! She never grew after she was ten, I am told. Yes, it is a dreadful pity," gazing into her hostess's horrified countenance. "Sitting down, she is just like other people—but when she stands up she seems to have no legs."

"A dwarf! No legs! And she thought of coming to me! And I was just going to write and ask her to start in November," repeated Mrs. Brande in gasps.

"Well, my dear, it is a most fortunate circumstance that your letter has not gone. What could you have done with her! You could never have taken her out except after dark."

This was a terribly effective thrust! Mrs. Brande was wholly unable to retaliate, and made no reply.

"A dwarf!" Her mind conjured up a little fat sallow woman, such as she had once seen outside a show at a fair, and that miserable stunted native who was carried about Shirani, begging, on the shoulders of a boy.

And her niece, of whose picture she was so proud, that she had placed it in a solid silver frame—her lovely niece was like that!

"I wonder Honor never told me," murmured Mrs. Brande at last.

"And I do not," was the emphatic rejoinder. "From all accounts, the mother and sisters have always spoiled the little one, who believes that she is in no way different to other people, and is too ridiculously vain. Even if she had been five foot six, I am sure that you are far

happier without her," concluded Mrs. Langrishe, rising and squeezing her hostess's hand as she spoke. And having offered this small fragment of consolation she rustled away.

Mrs. Brande, poor woman, had been indeed trampled upon and crushed to the very earth. She had been asked to join in her rival's song of triumph over Miss Paske's superb success; she had been consoled with on her own dear girl's misfortunes; and she had been informed that she was aunt to a dwarf!

She sat for some in a shattered, stupified condition; then she got up, and hastily carried off Fairy's photograph and locked it away in a box, secure from all eyes, and from even the Ayah's inquisitive brown fingers.

Honor noticed the absence of her sister's picture from its usual post of honour—it was nowhere to be seen—the absence of Fairy's name in conversation, the sudden cessation of all interest in Gerty Hadfield's movements, and guessed rightly that some one had kindly enlightened her aunt, and that she was in possession of the other reason now.

CHAPTER XL.

THE NEW WEARER OF THE CORNELIAN RING.

SIX weeks had crawled by. With all his occupation Mark found time desperately hard to kill; he felt as if he had lived his present life for at least six years. The monsoon had broken, and on some days the torrents compelled him to remain indoors; and whilst sheets of rain and hurricanes of wind swept the valley, an appalling loneliness settled down upon the miserable young man.

His father passed many hours in sleep, and he had not a soul with whom to exchange a word. One evening, during a welcome break, he was riding homewards down a steep and slippery path that wound through wet dark pine-woods, when his pony suddenly shied so violently as almost to lose its footing; he had taken fright at an undefined object beside the road, something which at first his rider mistook for a bear, until it emitted a groan of unmistakable human anguish.

"What is the matter?" asked Jervis, as he quickly dismounted.

"Alas, I have hurt my foot!" replied a female voice in Hindustani. "I fell down—I cannot walk."

Jervis threw the bridle over his arm, lit a match, and, shading it with his hand, saw, huddled up, what appeared to be an old native woman. She explained to him, between groans and gasps, that she had twisted her ankle over a root on the path, and could not move.

"Are you far from home?" he inquired.

"Three miles."

"In which direction?"

"The hill above the old cantonment."

"I know. If you think you can sit on my pony, I will lead him and take you home safely."

"Oh, I am such a coward," she cried. "Is the pony gentle?"

"Yes, he is all right; I will answer for the pony."

"I—and I cannot bear pain. Oh—oh! but I must"—vainly struggling to rise, and sinking down again.

She proved a light weight as Jervis raised her bodily in his arms and placed her in the saddle. Fortunately the pony, who bore the suggestive name of "Shaitan," was too much sobered by a long journey to offer any active opposition to carrying a lady. The homeward progress proved exceedingly tedious; the road was bad and nearly pitch dark. The native woman, who ap-

peared to know every yard of the way, directed her companion by a path almost swallowed up in jungle, to a hill behind the old mess-house. Up and up they climbed, till they came to a tiny stone bungalow, with a light in the window. The door was thrown open by another native woman and an old man, whose shrill voluble lamentations were almost deafening.

"You had better let me carry you in!" suggested Jervis.

"No, no." Then imperiously to the other woman, "Anima, bring hither a chair and help me down."

But Anima, of the lean and shrivelled frame, had been set a task far beyond her strength, and in the end it was the muscular arms of the young Englishman that lifted the other from the saddle. As he placed her carefully on the ground, her shawl, or sarie, fell back, and the lamp-light revealed a fair-skinned woman with snow-white hair, and a pair of magnificent black eyes. She was possibly fifty years of age—or more—and though her lips were drawn with pain, she was remarkably handsome, with a high-bred cast of countenance. No native this; at any rate, she resembled no native that Jervis had ever seen. Who was she?

A glance into the interior surprised him still further; instead of the usual jumble of cooking-pots, mats, and hookahs, he caught a glimpse of a round table, with a crimson cover. A newspaper, or what looked like one, lay upon it; there was an armchair, a fire blazing in a fireplace, with a cat sedately blinking before it.

Who was this woman? He was not likely to learn any further particulars—at present, for she was helped in by her two servants, and as he waited the door was abruptly closed and barred, and he was left outside, alone in the cold and darkness. Here was gratitude!

He rode slowly home,—the pony figuratively groping his way, whilst his master was lost in speculation. This

was the mysterious neighbour, he felt certain; this was the tender of the graves,—the owner of the voice.

He related his adventure to his father whilst they played piquet.

Major Jervis was not half as much surprised as the young man had anticipated—he simply stroked his forehead, a favourite trick of his, and said, with his eyes still fastened on his cards,—

“Oh, so you have come across the Persian woman! I so seldom hear of her, I had forgotten her.”

“Persian?”

“Yea. She has been in these hills for years, working among the lepers. A fair-skinned woman, with great haunting dark eyes.”

“But who is she?” throwing down his cards and looking eagerly at his father.

“She is what I tell you,” impatiently—“a Persian; they are generally fair, and I dare say she has been handsome in her day, about thirty years ago. Why are you so interested?”

“Because I have another idea in my head; I believe she is an Englishwoman.”

The major’s laugh was loud and sound, and not at all mad.

“She is a Persian; only, of course, you are no judge, and to the very tips of her fingers.”

“But what is she doing up here?”

“I would rather you asked her that than I did,” was the extremely sane reply. “She is a Christian, I believe, and is working out her sins. I have no doubt she is a woman with a past. You can read it in her eyes. Come, my boy, take up your hand; it’s your turn to play.”

Mark Jervis, as we know, had not been permitted time or opportunity to read anything, whether referring to past or present, in the Persian’s eyes; but this omission was corrected ere long.

One afternoon he noticed a figure, stick in hand, resting on the mess-house steps, as he rode by—a figure which raised the stick and imperatively summoned him to approach.

It was undoubtedly his recent acquaintance, who pulled the veil further over her head, as she said,—

“Sahib, I wish to thank you for your charitable benevolence. Truly, but for you, I should have lain all night in the forest, in the rain, and among the beasts.”

“I hope you are better?” he asked, doffing his cap.

“Yea, nearly well. Though I am a stranger to you, I know that you are Jones Sahib’s son.”

“Major ‘Jervis’ is his real name. Yea—I am his son.”

“I have heard of you,” she continued, rather loftily.

“Indeed!”

“From the leper-folk,” she added, significantly.

“It is you who keep the graves yonder in order?”

“May be!” was her cautious reply.

“And who sing English hymns in the old church?”

A slight contraction passed over her face as she replied,—

“Nay—I am a Persian woman from Bushire. What should I know of thy songs or thy tongue?”

“Then who—can it be?” inquired Jervis, looking at her steadfastly.

“Noble youth—why ask me? A woman from the dead, perchance,” she retorted mockingly.

“At least it is you who do so much good among the sick Pahari-folk and lepers?” he persisted.

“Yea, I am but one—the field is great. Who can fill jars with dew? I would I could do more.”

“I believe that were hardly possible.”

“As far as these hands go,” extending a pair of delicately shaped members, “I do what I can; but what is one lemon for a whole village to squeeze! If I had a big house that would serve as a hospital, I would have

my heart's desire. I am skilled in medicine, so also is my servant; we would have our sick beside us, and could do much—that is my dream. It will never come to pass till the sun shall be folded up and the stars shall fall."

"Surely one of these bungalows would answer. Why not this mess-house?" suggested Jervis.

"True; but the sircar would not yield it to me. Already the sircar has given me my abode; and doubtless, were I to ask for the Mess Khana, they would aver that I was like to the man who, on receiving a cucumber, demanded a tope of mango trees! Moreover this dead station may reawaken once more. Even in my memory the merry sahibs and mem sahibs have sojourned here, and held great tamashas; but it is years since they came, and the place, perchance, is forgotten."

"And so you have lived here alone—for years?" said the young man. His remarkably expressive eyes distinctly added the "*Why?*" his tongue refrained from uttering.

"Yea, I have been dead to the world and the roar of strife and life for many moons! If all tales be true,—tales whispered even in this empty land,—you have forsaken many delights to give your days to the old man, your father? Is it not so?" She looked up with a quick gesture, and her sarree fell back.

As Jervis gazed down into the dark eyes turned towards him, he agreed with his father; here was undoubtedly a woman with a past—and a tragic past!

"It is a noble sacrifice," she continued; "but what with the Koran? 'Whatever good works ye send on for your behoof, ye shall find them with God.' I am old enough to be your mother. I marvel if I had had a son, would he sacrifice himself thus for me—were I of your people, a Feringhee woman, I marvel?" she repeated meditatively, as she put up her hand to draw her veil farther over her head.

As she did so, the young man started as he recognised her ring—Honor's cornelian ring. Many a time he had noticed it on her finger, and her peculiar trick of turning it round and round, when in any mental quandary, had been the subject of more than one family jest. How came it to be on the hand of this Mahomedan woman?

She instantly interpreted his glance, and exclaimed,—

"You observe my ring. Truly it is of little value—in money—but to me it is beyond price. It was given to me by a maiden I saw but once. Her words were pearls, her lips were rubies, but her music, and her eyes, drew the story of my life from my inmost soul."

"I am sure I know the lady!" cried her listener impetuously, "young—and tall—and beautiful. She plays what you call the sitar. Where did you meet her?"

"Ah, Sahib, that is my secret," she answered after an expressive pause; "but, lo! I can reveal yours," and she looked at him steadily as she added, "you love her."

"What do you mean?" he stammered. "Why do you say so?" and he coloured up to the roots of his crisp brown hair.

"Of a truth, I read it in your face. It is not for naught that folk call me a magic wallah." And she rose stiffly to depart. "You have abandoned her, I see," she continued, with a flash of her wonderful eyes, "and lo, the fat old mem sahib, her mother, will marry her to some one else! Behold your reward for doing your duty!" And entirely forgetting her previous quotation from the Koran, with this unpleasant and cynical remark, the Persian made him a profound salaam and hobbled away.

CHAPTER XLI.

"IT WAS A HYENA."

THE rains were over by the middle of August, and Shirani cast off mackintoshes, discarded umbrellas, and society—restless and fluctuating—looked about for some fresh and novel form of out-door amusement.

Among the second-leave arrivals, the most active and enterprising of the new-comers, was a Captain Bevis, the moving power in whatever station he was quartered; the very man for getting up dances, races, and picnics. He was resolved to strike out an entirely original line on the present occasion, and inaugurated a grand joint expedition into the interior—none of your exclusive "family parties," or a petty little "set" of half a dozen couples. No, this sanguine individual actually proposed to move Shirani *en masse*. He had heard of the abandoned cantonment, of Hawal Bagh, galloped over to inspect it with his customary promptitude, and came flying back to the station on the wings of enthusiasm. "It was a perfect spot," this was his verdict; scenery exquisite, good road, good water, lots of bungalows, a mess-house to dance in, a parade ground for gymkanas. Every one must see the place, every one must enjoy a short informal outing, the entertainment to be called the "Hawal Bagh week." Captain Bevis threw himself into the project heart and soul; he invited another hill station to join; he sent out circulars, he collected entries for gymkanas and polo matches, and the names of patronesses for the grand ball at Hawal Bagh. Dead and long-forgotten Hawal Bagh, that was to awake and live once more!

Subscriptions poured in, parties went over to explore, empty houses were allotted, a vast army of coolies was enlisted, the jungle was cut down, the bungalows cleaned up, the very gardens were put in order. A quantity of supplies, and cart loads of furniture were soon *en route*, and the servants of Shirani entered into the project with the zeal of the true Indian-born domestic, who hails a change, a "tamaasha," anything in the shape of a "feast," with a joy and energy totally unknown to the retainers of the folk in these colder latitudes.

Hospitable Mrs. Brande was to have a house and a house-party. "P." was absent on official business; but, under any circumstances, he would not have been a likely recruit for what he called a "new outbreak of jungle fever." The Dashwoods, the Booles, the Daubenys, the Clovers, were to have a married people's mess. There were also one or two chummeries, which made people look at one another and smile. The bachelors, of course, had their own mess; moreover, there were tents.

Mrs. Langrishe joined neither mess nor chummary, this clover woman was merely coming as the Clovers' guest for two days, and Lalla was Mrs. Dashwood's sole charge. Mrs. Sladen, of course, stayed with Mrs. Brande, who had been relegated to the old commandant's house, an important-looking roomy bungalow, standing in a great wilderness of a garden and peach orchard. Once or twice during the last twenty years it, and one or two other bungalows, had been let (to the Persian's great annoyance) for a few months in the season to needy families from the plains, who only wanted air, good hill air, and could afford but little else!

Mrs. Brande and her party arrived a whole day before the general public, travelling comfortably by easy stages through great forests of pine, oak, or rhododendron, along the face of bold, bare cliffs, across shallow river-

beds and through more than one exquisite park-like glade dotted with trees and cattle. Naturally, Mrs. Brande kept a suspicious eye on these latter. When the travellers reached their destination, they found that roads had been repaired, lamp-posts and oil lamps erected, the old band-stand was renovated—servants were hurrying to and fro, carrying furniture, shaking carpets, airing bedding and picketing ponies. There were coolies, Syceas, soldiers, and active sahibs galloping about giving directions. In fact Hawal Bagh had put back the clock of time, and to a cursory eye was once more the bustling, populous cantonment of forty years ago!

* * * * *

And how did the scanty society who dwelt in those parts relish the resurrection of Hawal Bagh? To the neighbouring poor hill villagers, this event was truly a god-send; they reaped a splendid and totally unexpected harvest, and were delighted to welcome the invaders, who purchased their fowl, eggs, grain, milk, and honey.

Mark Jervis beheld the transformation with mingled feelings. He had broken with his old life; most people, if they thought of him at all, believed him to be in England—two months is a long time to live in the memory of a hill station. Honor—she would be at Hawal Bagh—she had not forgotten him yet. He would hang about the hills, that he might catch a distant glimpse of her, or even of her dress. Surely he might afford himself that small consolation.

As for the Persian, she surveyed the troops of gay strangers from her eerie with a mixture of transports and anguish.

It was a fine moonlight night early in September, the hills loomed dark, and cast deep shadows into the bright white valley. The air was languorously soft, the milky way above conspicuous, and fully justified its Eastern name, "The Gate of Heaven."

There was to be a ball in the old mess-house, and Mark took his stand on the hill and watched the big cooking fires, the lit-up bungalows, the hurrying figures; listened to the hum of voices, the neighing of ponies, the tuning of musical instruments. Could this be really the condemned, deserted cantonment of Hawal Bagh, that many a night he had seen wrapped in deathlike silence? The dance commenced briskly, open doorways showed gay decorations, the band played a lively set of lancers, and a hundred merry figures seemed to flit round and pass and repass; whilst the jackals and hyenas, who had been wont to hold their assemblies in the same quarter, slunk away up the hills in horrified disgust. Presently people came out into the bright moonlight, and began to stroll up and down. Mark recognised many well-known figures. There was Honor, in white, walking with a little man who was conversing and gesticulating with considerable vivacity. She seemed preoccupied, and held her head high, gazing straight before her. Lookers-on see most of the game. The man must be a dense idiot not to notice that she was not listening to one word he said.

There was Miss Pooke, escorted by a ponderous companion with a rolling gait—Sir Gloster, of course—and Miss Lalla was undoubtedly entertaining him. It almost seemed as if he could hear his emphatic "excellent" where he stood. Mrs. Merryfeather, and Captain Dorington, Captain Merryfeather and Miss Fleet, and so on—and so on—as pair after pair came forth.

Suddenly he became aware of the fact that he was not the only spectator. Just below him stood a figure, so motionless that he had taken it for part of a tree. The figure moved, and he saw the Persian lady standing gazing with fixed, ravenous eyes on the scene below them. He made a slight movement, and she turned hastily and came up towards him. They were acquaint-

ances of some standing now, and met once or twice a week, either among the lepers or about the cantonment. Mark had never ventured to call at the mysterious little bungalow, but he sent her offerings of flowers, fruit, and hill partridges, and she in return admitted him to her friendship—to an entirely unprecedented extent. Whether this was due to the young man's handsome face and chivalrous respect for her privacy and her sex, or whether it was accorded for the sake of another, who shall say?

"You are looking on, like myself," he remarked, as she accosted him. "Are you interested?"

"Nay, 'the world is drowned to him who is drowned,' says the proverb. I came to Hawal Bagh to retire from the crowd, and lo! a crowd is at my gates!"

"This, surely, must be quite a novel sight to you?"

She gazed at him questioningly, and made no answer.

"Of course you have never seen this sort of thing before, English people in evening dress, dancing to a band?"

"I have known phantoms—yea, I have seen such as these," pointing, "in a—dream—thousands of years ago."

Her companion made no reply; the Persian often uttered dark sayings that were totally beyond his comprehension. Possibly she believed in the transmigration of souls, and was alluding to a former existence.

"Mine are but spirits, whereas to you these people are real flesh and blood," she resumed. "You were one of them but three months ago. Think well ere you break with your past and kill and bury youth. Lo, you grow old *already*! Let me plead for youth and love. Heaven has opened to me to-day. She," lowering her voice to a whisper, "is among those—I have seen her—she is there below."

"I know," he answered, also in a low voice.

"Then why do you not seek her—so young, so fair, so good? Oh! have you forgotten her sweet smile, her

charming eyes? Love, real love, comes but once! Go now and find her."

Mark shook his head with emphatic negation.

"What heart of stone!" she cried, passionately. "Truly I will go myself and fetch her here. I—— But no—I dare not," and she covered her face with her hands.

"Do not add your voice to my own mad inclinations. It is all over between us. To meet her, and to part again, would give her needless pain."

"Ah! again the music," murmured the Persian, as the band suddenly struck up a weird haunting waltz, which her companion well remembered—they had played it at the bachelors' ball. "Music," she continued, clenching her two hands, "of any kind has a sore effect on me. It tears my heart from my very body,—and yet I love it, yea, though it transport me to——" She paused, unable to finish the sentence. Her lips trembled, her great dark eyes dilated, and she suddenly burst into a storm of tears. The sound of her wild, loud, despairing sobs actually floated down and penetrated to the ears of a merry couple who were strolling at large, and now stood immediately below,—little guessing that another pair on the hillside were contemplating a scene of once familiar but now lost delights, like two poor wandering spirits.

"Surely," said Mrs. Merryfeather, "I heard a human voice, right up there above us. It sounded just like a woman weeping—crying as if her heart was broken."

"Oh, impossible!" scoffed the man. "Hearts in these days are warranted unbreakable, like toughened glass."

"Listen! There it is again!" interrupted the lady, excitedly.

"Not a bit of it, my dear Mrs. Merry; and your sex would not feel flattered if they heard that you had mistaken the cry of a wild beast for a woman's voice. I assure you, on my word of honour, that it is nothing but a hyena."

CHAPTER XLII.

BY THE OLD RIFLE RANGE.

A POWERFUL and determined temptation, that was deaf to reason or argument, struggled hourly to drag Mark Jervis to Hawal Bagh. It changed its fierce wrestlings, and passionate and even frantic pleadings, to soft, alluring whispers. It whispered that life was but an hour in the sons of time—a drop in the ocean of eternity. Why not taste the drop—enjoy the hour? Snatch the sunshine, and live one's little day, ere passing for ever into eternal darkness, and oblivion! It even quoted the Scriptures, and vehemently urged him to take no thought for the morrow—that sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof. It seized the brush from the hand of memory, and painted Honor Gordon as an angel. It babbled of a visit to Mrs. Brande—*she* had always been his friend. Surely there was no harm in going to see *her*! But the young man sternly silenced alike whisperings or pleadings. He beat the mad tempter to its knees, choked it, and, as he believed, put it to death. Why undergo the anguish of parting twice—why walk across red-hot plough-shares a second time?

For four whole days he held aloof, and never visited the cantonment—save in his thoughts and dreams. On the fifth he conscientiously set forth in the opposite direction, and after a long and aimless ride was astonished to find himself—no, not exactly on the enchanted ground, but close to the old rifle range, which lay at the back of its encompassing hills. To the left dipped a long valley, on the right of the path towered a forest of rhododendrons and ever-green oaks, carpeted with ferns,

and a blaze of delicate autumn flowers, here and there the Virginia creeper flared, and here and there a pale passion-flower had flung abroad its eager tendrils and attached two noble trees. All at once, a fat white puppy came bustling through the undergrowth; he was chasing a family of respectable elderly monkeys, with the audacity common to his age and race. Truly the pup is the father of the dog; and Jervis, who was walking slowly with his pony following him, recognised this particular pup at once as an old friend. He had bought him and presented him to Mrs. Brande when her grief was as yet too fresh—and this same rollicking, well-to-do animal had once been indignantly spurned! To whom did he now belong? Who was his master or his mistress? There was a sound of light young footsteps, a crashing of small twigs, a glimpse of a white dress, and an anxious girlish voice calling, "Tommy, Tommy, Tommy!"

In another second Honor Gordon ran down into the path, about thirty yards ahead of Tommy's donor. She was almost breathless, her hat was in her hand—possibly it had been snatched off by an inquisitive branch as she struggled after the runaway. The soft little locks on her forehead were ruffled, and she had an unusually brilliant colour.

As Mark's starving eyes devoured her face, he thought he had never seen her look so lovely. He summoned up all his self-command—there must be no going back to "old days," no moaning over "what might have been." No; he was the stronger, and must set a stern example.

For quite twenty seconds there was a dead silence, a silence only broken by the trickling of a snow-born mountain stream, passing lingeringly through the ferns and orchids,—who seemed to stoop and bend over,—listening intently to its timid silvery song.

"How changed he was!" thought Honor, with a queer tight feeling in her throat, "only three short months, and the bright look of buoyant youth had faded from his face."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, with a supreme effort. "I had a presentiment that I should see you soon—I dreamt it!"

"Dreams sometimes go by contraries," he answered, with a rather fixed smile.

"And how clever of Tommy to find you! The dear dog remembered you."

"Well, up to the present he has not shown any symptoms of recognising me; on the contrary, he has cut me dead. He is in hot pursuit of some venerable lum-goon. How long is it since he has seen me?" asked Mark.

"The day of the bachelors' ball. I recollect you gave him a meringue, and very nearly killed him! It was on the eighth of June. This is the tenth of September; just three months and two days."

"So it is," he acquiesced, with forced nonchalance.

"Do you live near here?" she continued.

"About four miles, by a goat path across that hill."

"Pray are you aware that we are picnicing below, with half Shirani?"

"Yes, I know; but not another starvation picnic, I hope?"

"And yet," ignoring his ill-timed jest, "you have never come to see us,—and we leave to-morrow!"

He looked down to avoid her questioning eyes, and made no answer, beyond a faint, half-strangled sigh.

"At least we are still friends," she urged, swallowing something in her throat.

"Yes—always; but I thought I had better remain away. The Shirani folk would take me for a ghost, and I might upset their nerves. What is the latest station news?"

"Our latest news is that Mrs. Sladen is to go home at Christmas. Miss Clover is engaged to Captain Burne, and Miss Paske to Sir Gloster Sandllanda," she answered stiffly.

"Poor Toby! I suppose my former acquaintances believe me to be in England—if they ever think of me at all?"

She hesitated, twisted her ring round and round, and then said,—

"Your friends," with emphasis, "know that you are out in this country, looking after your father. How is he?"

"Wonderfully better, thank you."

"And you—you have been ill?" she remarked rather tremulously.

"No, indeed; I never was better in my life. Of course you saw Waring before he went down?"

"No," with undeniable embarrassment. "In fact, he copied your example, and dispensed with all farewells. He—he—left rather suddenly," and she coloured.

"Why do you hesitate?" looking at her keenly. "What did he do? He has been doing something, I can see."

"It was rather what he did not do," with a constrained laugh. "Of course it is no business of mine. He did not pay any of his bills. I am not sure whether I ought to tell you."

"And I am quite sure you ought," he answered with decision.

"But he left such quantities of debts behind him, and no—address——"

"Debts?" he repeated incredulously.

"Yes, he paid for nothing. Club accounts, card accounts, mess bills, servants' wages—not even his bearer's bill for thread and buttons and blacking. People," with a nervous little laugh, "seem to think that was the greatest enormity of all!"

"No!" cried Mark, his pale face turning to a vivid red, "I will tell you of a greater. I knew he had spent and muddled away most of our joint-funds—and the day I was last in Shirani I collected the bills and gave him all the money I had in the world—a cheque for five hundred pounds, to settle our affairs. He swore, on his honour, he would pay them at once and send me the receipts. Now, of course, every one in Shirani believes me to be as great a swindler and thief as he is! They must naturally suppose that I—I—bolted from my creditors! I," with increasing warmth, "now understand why you stammered and hesitated when I asked if I was not forgotten. Forgotten! I shall live in people's memories for years—on the principle that 'the evil which men do lives after them.'"

"I am sorry I told you——" she began eagerly.

"And I have chiefly myself to blame. I was an idiot to trust Waring. I had had one lesson; but—I was half mad with my own troubles, and determined to tear myself away from Shirani at once. I felt that if I stayed on, I might yield to temptation—good resolutions and fresh impressions might fade—and I might never return here——"

The pup, flouted and evaded by the scornful lumgoes, and exhausted by his tremendous efforts, now squatted on the path, apparently listening open-mouthed to every word.

The grey pony had also drawn near, and occasionally rubbed his handsome head against his master's shoulder, as much as to say, "Enough of such fooling; let us move on!"

"This is horrible!" continued Mark. "I hate to owe a penny, and I have no means of paying our joint-debts, for Waring has wolfed the cheque."

"And your uncle?"

"He has never written once. From his point of view,

I have treated him atrociously, and I am awfully sorry he should think so, for I am very fond of him. Of course he has done with me. And," with a grim smile, "I am now in sober truth—a *real* poor relation. I am a pretty sort of fellow," he went on; "I have talked of nothing but myself—and money—money—money, for the last five minutes. Tell me of *yourself*. Are you having a good time?"

"A good time!" she echoed, with a flash of her dark grey eyes.

"I beg your pardon, Honor," he said, humbly. "But it has been one of my few consolations, when I roam about these hills, to think that you were happier than I am."

"And had forgotten you?" she added, expressively.

"And," with a slight tremor in his voice, "had forgotten me."

"Never!" she returned, with passionate energy.

"Yes—you will, in time; perhaps not for two or three years—for you are not like other girls. I am your first lover—nothing can deprive me of that memory."

"No, nothing!" she admitted, almost in a whisper.

"But, you know, they say a woman generally marries her *second* love," with a laborious effort to speak steadily.

"How calmly you can discuss my lovers and my future!" cried Honor, indignantly. "Oh, how hard you have become—how cold—how cruel!"

"Cruel—if I am cruel—only to be kind," he replied, steadily. "For, years to come, you will thank me—and think——"

"I think," she interrupted, with a pitiful little gesture, "that when we meet so—seldom—scarcely ever—that you might be——" Here her voice totally failed her.

She had grown much paler, and her breath came quickly, as she tried to keep down a sob.

Mark resisted a wild impulse to take her in his arms—and, stooping, picked up the pup instead.



"Your uncle got my letter?" he asked, in a cool, formal tone.

"Yes, and was dreadfully concerned; but he said you were a man of honour, and your views and his were identical—but—I don't agree with them."

"You don't agree with them! What do you mean?"

"He told auntie, of course—and of course I insisted on her telling me. After all, it was my affair. I know the obstacle—I am ready to be your wife, just the same. As for poverty——"

"Poverty!" he interrupted quickly, "is not the question. I have a little money of my own, and I could put my shoulder to the wheel and work for you, Honor. It is not that—it is that my future is overshadowed, my reason stalked, by an hereditary and implacable enemy. I have no right to drag another into the pit—and, please God, I never will! When I lived a smooth, luxurious sort of life, in those days that seem years ago, I thirsted for some difficult task, something to do that would single me out and set me apart from other men. My task has been allotted to me; it is not what I desired——"

"No!" interposed Honor, whose heart was fighting against her fate with a frenzy of despair. "Your task is to renounce everything—the world, and friends, and wealth, and me—and to bury yourself in these remote hills, with a crazy old gentleman who cannot realise the sacrifice. Don't!" with an impatient gesture of her hand, "I know that I am speaking as if I were mad, and in my old foolish way. I know in my heart that you are doing what is right—that you could not do otherwise, and I—I am proud of you."

Then, as she looked into his haggard, altered face and miserable eyes, and caught a glimpse of the real Mark beneath his armour of stoicism. "But, oh! it is hard—it is hard——" she added, as she covered her face with her hands and wept.

"Honor! for God's sake don't—don't—I implore you! I cannot bear this. I would go through all I have struggled with over again to save you one tear. Circumstances—destiny—or whatever they call it—is too strong for us. You must not let me spoil your life. You know I shall love you—you only—as long as I draw breath."

"I know that!" raising her wet eyes to his. "And you dare to talk to me of a good time, of marrying my second love! Oh, Mark, Mark! how could you?"

"I was a brute to say it. I thought it would make it easier for you—when——" and his voice broke—"sometimes—when—you think of me——"

"Which will be every day—and often. And now I must be going. I was already late enough when Tommy ran away. I was afraid of his meeting poor Ben's fate. Will you come with me as far as the brow of the hill, where our paths part?"

"Yes;—part for ever!" he added to himself.

As they turned, she asked him many questions concerning his life and his associates, his occupations. He, on his side, made the best of everything, painting the Yellow Bungalow, the gardens, the planters and missionaries with gorgeous colours.

"And are there no white women near you?" she inquired. "Have you never met one lady to speak to since you left Shirani?"

"Yes, I have one acquaintance; and one who is a friend of yours. She is a Persian, I believe. Your little cornelian ring has been a strong link between us. She is a most mysterious person. No one can tell who she is or where she came from. All we know is that she spends her present time in doing good, nursing the sick and dying. She told me that you knew the history of her life—you alone——"

"It is true," bending her head as she spoke, and fixing her eyes on the ground.

"She shrinks from all observation, but she does not hide from me—for your sake; we talk about you constantly. I may say always."

"Then give her a message from me, please. Tell her that I often think of her, and ask her if I may write to her, or if she will write to me."

"You forget that she is a Persian. How can she possibly write to you?"

Honor coloured painfully, and twisted her ring round and round before she spoke, and then she said,—

"Please give her the message all the same. I—I—can manage to get her letter read. I will understand it."

They were now at the point where their roads diverged, his went along the hill, hers led down into the valley. She stopped for a moment, and caressed the grey pony's sleek, hard neck; then she turned and gave the pony's master both her hands. They gazed at one another with sad white faces, reading their life's tragedy in each other's eyes. Then she suddenly tore her fingers from his clasp, and ran down the hill with Tommy in pursuit. Jervis stood where she had left him until the very last echo of her footsteps had died away.

"And that is a sound I shall never hear again," he groaned aloud, and, flinging himself down on the root of a tree, he covered his face with his hands. How long he remained in this attitude the grey pony alone knew! By-and-by he became tired of waiting,—for he was either too well fed or too sympathetic to graze. He came and rubbed his soft black muzzle against the man's short brown locks (his cap lay on the ground). It was his poor little attempt at consolation, and effectually roused his owner, though it did not comfort him, for what could a dumb animal know of the great distresses of the human heart?

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Honor was late for tiffin; in fact, it was getting on for

afternoon teatime when she arrived. She discovered the bungalow in a state of unusual commotion. There was visible excitement on the servants' faces, an air of extra importance (were that possible) in the bearer's barefooted strut—he now appeared to walk almost entirely on his heels.

Mrs. Brande was seated at a writing-table, beginning and tearing up dozens of notes; her cap was askew, her fair hair was ruffled, and her face deeply flushed. What could have happened?

"Oh, Honor, my child, I thought you were never coming back; I have been longing for you," rushing at her. "But how white you look, dearie; you have walked too far. Are you ill?"

"No, no, auntie. What is it? There is something in the air. What has happened?"

For sole answer, Mrs. Brande cast her unexpected weight upon her niece's frail shoulder, and burst into loud, hysterical tears.

"Only think, dear girl!"—convulsive sobs—"a coolie has just come, and brought a letter from P. They have made him a K. C. B."—boisterous sobs—"and your poor old auntie—is—a lady at last!!!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

"RAFFLE IT!"

"MAJOR and Mrs. Granby Langrishe request the honour of Mr. and Mrs. Blanks's company at St. John's church at two o'clock on the afternoon of the 20th inst., to be present at the marriage of their niece and Sir Gloster Sandilands."

These invitation cards, richly embossed in silver, were

to be seen in almost every abode in Shirani. The wedding dress was on its way from Madame Phelps, in Calcutta. The cake and champagne were actually in the house. There were to be no bridesmaids, only two little pages—"they were cheaper," Mrs. Langrishe said to herself; "a set of girls would be expecting jewellery and bouquets." Happy Mrs. Langrishe, who had been overwhelmed with letters and telegrams of congratulations. She had indeed proved herself to be the clever woman of the family. It was her triumph—more than Lalla's—and she was radiant with pride and satisfaction. Yea, her self-congratulations were fervent. She was counting the days until her atrocious little incubus went down the ghaat as Lady Sandilands. A little incubus, securely fastened on another person's shoulders—for life!

Lalla was entirely occupied with letters, trousseau, and preparations. She was to have taken the principal part in a grand burlesque, written specially for her, by Toby Joy. The burlesque had been on hand for two months, and was to bring the Shirani season to a fitting and appropriate close. The piece was called "Sinbad the Sailor." Lalla had been rehearsing her songs and dances most industriously, until she had been called upon to play another part—the part of Sir Gloster's *fiancée*.

Sir Gloster did not care for burlesques; he had never seen Miss Paske in her true element—never seen her dance. It was not befitting her future position that she should appear on the boards. No, no; he assured her that he was somewhat old-fashioned, his mother would not like it. She must promise him to relinquish the idea, and never to perform in public again. But Lalla was stubborn; she would not yield altogether. Urged by Toby Joy, by the theatrical troupe—who felt that they could not pull through without their own bright particular star—she held out in a most unreason-

able and astonishing manner. At length she submitted so far as to declare that "she would wear Turkish trousers, if he liked!" This she announced as if making an enormous concession.

"He certainly did not wish her to wear Turkish trousers!" he returned, greatly scandalized. "How could she make such a terrible suggestion?" He was heavy and inert, but he could oppose a dead, leaden weight of resistance to any scheme which he disliked. This he called "manly determination;" but Lalla had another name for it—"pig-headed obstinacy!" However, she coaxed, promised, flattered, wept, and worked upon her infatuated lover so successfully, that he reluctantly permitted her to take a very small part, so as not to have her name removed from the bills; but this was to be positively "Her last appearance," and she might announce it on the placards, if she so pleased. He himself was summoned to Allahabad on urgent business—in fact to arrange about settlements—and he would not be present, he feared; but he would do his best to return by the end of the week.

Miss Paske's part, the dancing, singing peri, was given to a very inferior performer—who was the stage manager's despair, and a most hopeless stick. Freddy Joy, who was in woefully low spirits respecting the certain failure of the burlesque, and—other matters—came to Lalla on the night but one before the play.

"She has got influenza—so it's all up," making a feint of tearing his hair, "and every place in the house sold for two nights, and—an awful bill for dresses and properties. What is to become of me? Can't you take it? It was your own part—you do it splendidly—no professional could beat you. Come, Lalla!"

"I promised I would not dance," she answered, with a solemn face.

"Time enough to tie yourself up with promises after

you are married. Take your fling *now*—you have only ten days—you'll never dance again."

"No, never," she groaned.

"He is away, too," urged this wicked youth, "he is not coming up till Saturday; he won't know, till all is over, and then he will be as proud as a peacock. You have your dresses, you had everything ready until he came and spoilt the whole 'box of tricks.'" And Toby looked unutterable things. "Did he say anything to your aunt?" he asked.

"No—not a word. You don't suppose that I allow *her* to mix herself up in my affairs? It was merely between him and me——"

"Well, you can easily smoothe him down—and if you don't take your own original part, I must send round a peon this afternoon, to say that the burlesque has been put off, owing to the illness of the prima-donna—the 'incapability' is the proper word. But you are a brick, and you won't let it come to *that*; you will never leave us in a hole."

A little dancing devil in each eye eagerly assured him that she would not fail them. Yes, the combined entreaties of her own set—their compliments and flattery—her own hungry craving for what Toby called "one last fling," carried the point. *He* would not be back until Saturday. The piece was for Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, and she could (as she believed) easily talk him over. Yes, she made up her mind that she would play the peri; and she informed her aunt, with her most off-hand air, "that she had been prevailed on to take the principal part; that Miss Lane was ill (and any way would have been a dead failure); that she could not be so shamefully *selfish* as to disappoint every one; that the proceeds were for a charity (after the bills were paid there would not be much margin), and Mrs. Langrish, in sublime ignorance of Lalla's promise, acqui-

esced as usual. She now subscribed to all her niece's suggestions with surprising amiability, assuring herself that the days of her deliverance from "a girl in a thousand" were close at hand!

The burlesque of Sinbad was beautifully staged, capitally acted, and a complete success. Miss Paske's dancing and singing were pronounced to be worthy of a London theatre—if not of a music hall. People discussed her wherever they met, and all the men hastened, as it were in a body, to book places for the next performance.

The ladies were not altogether so enthusiastic; indeed, some of them were heard to wonder how Sir Gloster would have liked it.

Sir Gloster, on the wings of love, was already half way through his return journey. He had transacted his business with unexpected promptitude, and was breakfasting at a certain dāk bungalow, encompassed with many parcels and boxes. Here he was joined by two subalterns, who were hurrying in the opposite direction—that is, from Shirani to the plains. They were full of the last evening's entertainment, and could talk of nothing but the burlesque.

"It was quite A1," they assured their fellow-traveller. "It could not be beaten in London—no, not even at the Empire. Miss Paske was simply ripping!"

"Yes," returned Sir Gloster, complacently, "I believe there is a good deal of nice feeling in her acting, but she had only a minor part."

"Bless your simple, innocent heart!" exclaimed the other, "she was the principal figure; she was the whole show; she filled the bill."

"May I ask what you mean?" demanded the baronet, with solemn, white dignity.

"She was the peri, didn't you know? She dances every bit as well as Lottie Collins or Sylvia Grey, doesn't she, Capel?" appealing eagerly to his comrade.

"Yes; and I'd have gone to see her again to-night, only for this beastly court-martial. I gave my ticket over to Manders, for he couldn't get a place. She draws like a chimney on fire; there is no squeezing in at the door—even window-sills were at a premium. You ought to go on, Sir Gloster; of course you will get a seat," with a significant laugh. "This is the last performance, and, upon my word, you should not miss it."

Sir Gloster remained mute. Was it possible that his little Lalla, who wrote him such sweet, endearing notes, had deliberately broken her word, and defied him?

At the very thought of such a crime his white, flabby face grew rigid. Seeing was believing. He would take this crack-brained young man's advice, and hurry on. He might manage to be in Shirani by eight o'clock that evening—just in time to dress and get to the play.

His wrath was hot within him—and the anger of a quiet and lethargic person, when once roused, is a very deadly thing. His sturdy hill ponies bore the first brunt of his indignation; and Sir Gloster, who was naturally a timid horseman, for once threw fear to the winds, and galloped as recklessly as Toby Joy himself. He arrived at the club just in time to swallow a few mouthfuls, change his clothes, and set off to the theatre. He could not get a seat, but "he might, if he liked, stand near the door, with his back to the wall," and for this handsome privilege he paid four rupees—the best laid-out money he ever invested, as he subsequently declared. The curtain had already risen; the scene looked marvellously like fairyland. Toby Joy had just concluded a capital topical song, when a large egg was carefully rolled upon the stage. The egg-shell opened without the application of a spoon, and hatched out a most exquisite creature, the *peri*, whose appearance was the signal for a thunder of hand-clapping. The *peri*—yes—was Lalla, in very short, flimsy petticoats, with a twinkling star in her hair

—his own present, as Sir Gloster noted with an additional spasm of indignation.

Presently she began to dance.

Now, be it known, that her performance was perfectly decorous and delightfully graceful. Lalla's glancing feet scarcely touched the ground, and she danced as if from pure happiness and lightness of heart. (Toby Joy danced as if he had *le diable au corps*.) After entrancing the spectators for ten thrilling minutes with several entirely fresh variations, Lalla finished up with the tee-to-tum spin, which is to the dancer what the high note, at the end of a song, is to the singer!

The result of this effort was a hurricane of frantic applause, in which Sir Gloster took no part; he was not a theatre-goer—he was provincial. His mother and his surroundings were strictly evangelical; and whilst his *fiancée* enchanted the whole station, he stood against the wall, glowering and pale. The only character present to his mind was *the daughter of Herodias*! Frankly speaking, the performance had filled him with horror. That the future Lady Sandilands should offer herself thus to public contemplation; that any one who chose to pay four rupees might see this indecorous exhibition—including soldiers in uniform—at the low price of four annas!

He was actually beside himself with fury, and forced his way out, with his head down, like a charging animal. Few noticed him or his hasty exit; every one had eyes for Lalla, and Lalla only. She received an ovation and a shower of bouquets as she was conducted before the curtain by Toby Joy, modestly curtsying and kissing her hand. Miss Paake subsequently remained to enjoy a merry and *recherché* supper, chaperoned by the invaluable Mrs. Dashwood; and Mrs. Langrishe—as was not an unusual occurrence—went home alone.

To that lady's great amazement, she discovered Sir Gloster awaiting her in the drawing-room, and she

gathered from his strange and agitated appearance that something terrible had occurred.

"I was thinking of writing to you, Mrs. Langrishe," he began in a curiously formal voice, "but I changed my mind, and came to see you instead. All is over between your niece and myself."

Mrs. Langrishe turned perfectly livid, and dropped into the nearest chair.

"Pray, explain!" she faltered at last.

"Miss Paske will doubtless *explain* to you why she gave me a solemn promise to renounce dancing on a public stage. I reluctantly allowed her to appear for the last time in a very small part—that of an old nurse. I return unexpectedly, and discover her in the character of a ballet-girl, exhibiting herself—well, I must say it—half naked to the whole of Shirani. Such a person is not fit to be my wife. She has broken her word. She has a depraved taste; she has no modesty."

That Ida Langrishe should live to hear such epithets applied to her own flesh and blood!

She covered her face with her hands, and actually sobbed aloud. Who had ever seen Mrs. Langrishe break down before? No one.

"Oh, dear Sir Gloster," she began hysterically (she would need all her fascinations now), "Lalla is so young" (only twenty-six). "She is easily worked upon, she is in great request; the burlesque would have fallen through—and it is for such a good charity—if she had not, at the eleventh hour, consented to take a part."

"I cannot accept your excuses, my dear madam" (waving both fat hands, like the flappers of an angry seal). "I could never trust Miss Paske again. Imagine the future Lady Sandilands displaying her arms—and, excuse me, her legs—in ungraceful antics for the amusement of any one who chose to pay two or three rupees. At the eleventh hour, I absolutely refuse to marry her!"

"You are not afraid of a breach-of-promise case?" asked Mrs. Langrishe in despair. She was indeed dying in the last ditch.

"Not in the least," was the bold reply. "No man—no gentleman is compelled to marry an amateur mountebank! Oh, if my poor, dear mother had been present this night, I believe the shock would have killed her! However, I am grateful for small mercies; I am thankful that I saw Miss Paske in her true colours before it was too late!"

"The invitations are out days ago; the trousseau is almost complete; the presents have come in shoals; the cake is actually in the house,—what am I to do?" pleaded unhappy Mrs. Langrishe, in a transport of anguish.

"I'm sure I don't know. I wash my hands of the whole affair. I am going down to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning!" repeated the unfortunate lady.

"Yes; I have no personal ill-will or ill-feeling against you, Mrs. Langrishe," he continued, as if he were offering her some superb token of generosity. "It is not your fault, though I must confess that I always thought you rather spoiled Miss Paske. However, in the present instance, I hold you entirely blameless; but *nobleless oblige*—and I—a—really could not ask my mother and friends to receive a young a—a—lady—whose proper sphere is pantomime and—all that sort of thing!" And waving his adieux with a large, tremulous hand, he stalked out,—and with him Mrs. Langrishe saw depart Lalla's brilliant prospects, her own reputation as a clever woman, and the solid embodiment of an immense outlay of forbearance—flattery—and rupees.

She sat for a long time over the dying wood fire, her face the colour of its ashes.

At three o'clock in the morning Lalla (a true rake at heart) had not returned, and her impending interview was thus postponed for twelve hours. It was past three o'clock in the afternoon when Miss Paske sauntered into

her aunt's room. Mrs. Langrishe was prostrate, from the double effect of a sleepless night and a nervous headache.

Lalla listened to her outburst incredulously. She had dressed herself with special care, collected all her bouquets, and had resolved to enact a pretty little semi-penitential scene, with her stolid, easy-going, somewhat dull *Mancé*. She expected him now at any moment. What was this her aunt was saying? He had come; and seen; and fled! Impossible! He had been present last night! For once, she signally failed to sneer down, laugh down, or in any way suppress or silence her relative. Oh; she had been *mad* to listen to Toby Joy, she was always too ready to be over-persuaded by him. He had had nothing on the hazard, whilst she had her all at stake. And her magnificent prospects, her title, her diamonds, were at that moment rapidly rumbling down hill in the rickety mail tonga.

The presents, the invitations, the breakfast—what people would say, especially her own people, and the not unnatural elation of old Mother Brande, on whom she had ruthlessly trampled? All these things flashed through her mind.

She would, of course, be sent home immediately. What a horrible outlook. To remain till the end of her days, as a sort of "object lesson," a terrible living example, in the corner of her father's large shabby country house. She would be pointed out to her younger sisters, and to others, as the old maid who had had her chance, and had danced it away!

During all this time her aunt was speaking fluently, ceaselessly, passionately, but to deaf ears—for Lalla was listening to her own thoughts, and too much occupied by the clamour of an inward voice to heed these outpourings.

At last one sentence struck her ear.

"And what is to be done with the cake, that has cost

two hundred rupees, and is now in my storeroom?" demanded Mrs. Langrishe, dramatically.

"Raffle it," cried Lalla, with a reckless laugh, "or have another starvation picnic, and give them wedding-cake and sugar ornaments!"

"*Lalla!*" shrieked her aunt, in a voice that would have sounded strange even to her most intimate friends. "You are the most abominable, unprincipled, devilish——"

"Oh, don't bother!" interrupted Lalla, savagely; and she went out of the room, and gave the door a bang that caused the very cheval-glass to stagger in its place.

Once in her own bower, Lalla turned the key and flung herself into an armchair, knocking, as she did so, a parcel off a table at her elbow. She stooped and picked it up mechanically. It was a birthday-book, one of her numerous wedding presents, and had arrived that morning. She opened it in order to search for the verse opposite the date of the day. Perhaps it would give her a clue as to her future plans. For Lalla was extremely superstitious, and often shaped her course by means of the most trivial instruments, which were accepted by her as signs, tokens, and omens. Idiotic and preposterous as it may appear, she attributed all her present misfortune, not to her own deceit and folly—oh dear, no!—but to the disastrous fact of having had a *green* dress in her trousseau, and that was entirely Aunt Ida's doing, no fault of hers.

Yes, Lalla had a curious temperament, and an imagination open to every fantastic influence. As she whirled over the leaves of the book, she said to herself, "I will take this as final, and abide by it, for bad or good."

It was the eleventh of September, and the lines were,—

"Retired from all, reserved, and coy,
To musing prone alone."

SCOTT.

"What utter bosh!" she exclaimed, passionately; then, like all dissatisfied inquirers, she determined to cast her first resolve to the winds and have yet another experiment—one more dip into the lottery of Fate.

"I'll see what it says for the twentieth—my wedding day, that was to have been——"

She turned to the page, and the lines were,—

"He has not a shilling, nor has he a care."

ARROW.

"There, that settles it," cried Lalla, tossing the book down and moving quickly to her writing-table.

* * * * *

In a few hours the news of the ruptured alliance was all over Shirani. Another piece of intelligence was faintly whispered, but not credited, for it was really too much for the gossip-mongers to digest all at once. This last item declared "that Miss Paske and Mr. Joy had been seen flying down the cart road in a special tonga. They had run away—she, from her aunt's reproaches, and he, from his regimental duty. They were both absent without leave."

For once rumour proved to be true in every particular. The pair were married at the first church they came to, and subsequently joined an English theatrical company that were touring in India, and accompanied them to the Straits Settlements, China, and Japan.

Toby and Lalla act under the professional alias of "Mr. and Mrs. Langrishe," to the unspeakable indignation of the rightful owners of the name.

Lalla had written her aunt a most wicked, flippant, impertinent, heartless, in fact, diabolical letter, mentioning that the name of Langrishe would now be surrounded by distinction and a lustre of fame,—and for the first time.

It was many months before the stately Ida recovered

her mental equilibrium and her spirits. The experiences she had undergone at the hands of "a girl in a thousand" had aged her considerably; there are now a good many lines in her smooth, ivory-tinted face, and silver threads among her well-dressed brown locks.

Every one tacitly avoids the subject of broken-off engagements, theatricals, and nieces in her presence; and it would be a truly bold woman (such as is not Mrs. Brande) who would venture to inquire "what had become of her charming niece, who was to have married the baronet?"

CHAPTER XLIV.

A ROSE—CARRIAGE PAID.

"SAHE, there is some one coming—in a jampan," was the bearer's surprising announcement to Jervie, who was sitting under a tree in the garden, busily engaged in painting a portrait of the bearer's grandson. Now, a jampan, or dandy, is a sort of hill sedan-chair, and a mode of conveyance exclusively reserved for ladies.

Who could the lady be who was coming to the Pela Kothi? thought the young man, starting to his feet. Honor! Impossible! Mrs. Brande? No—the big picnic had dispersed ten days ago. He hurried out into the verandah, and shaded his eyes with his hand. Yes, sure enough, a dandy, borne by four men, and containing some one holding an enormous white umbrella—some one being carried backwards up the hill, followed by a native on a pony and two coolies with luggage. The *cortège* were distinctly making for the house, for they turned off the road into the direct path; but all

that was visible was the white umbrella bobbing along among the tall jungle grass—and the white umbrella was approaching, as sure as fate.

* * * * *

For the last week Mark had noticed a great change in his father. As his mind strengthened, his bodily health appeared to fail—the hundred turns on the terrace were gradually lessening each morning as the steps that paced them became feebler and feebler, and the daily routine was now entirely set aside. An early ride had been Mark's chief relaxation, then breakfast with his father, afterwards he read the paper to him, talked to him, walked with him, until about three o'clock, when Major Jarvis went to sleep—and slept almost uninterruptedly till dinner time. Meanwhile his son walked over to see one of the neighbours, or sketched—he had made quite a gallery of types and portraits—or took his gun to try his luck among the hills.

The major was always at his best in the evening. He enjoyed a game of chess, *piquet*, or *écarté*; and he liked to talk of his experiences, his old friends and comrades, to smoke, to tell the same long stories over and over again, and it was often one or two o'clock in the morning ere his son could prevail on him to extinguish his hookah and go to bed. But for the last week or ten days there had been no late hours, and no strolling round the garden, or basking in the sun, and Mark had never left the place. He feared that his father was about to have some kind of an attack—whether bodily or mental, he was too inexperienced to say—and he had despatched a note that very morning to Mr. Burgess, asking him to ride over and see his patient.

Meanwhile the visitor was coming steadily nearer and nearer, the umbrella effectually concealing his or her identity. In due time the dandy was carried up backwards into the verandah, turned right-about-face, and

set down. And behold—under the umbrella sat—Mr. Pollitt!

Mr. Pollitt, looking exceedingly pleased with himself, and wearing a neat tweed Norfolk jacket, a courier bag, and an Elwood helmet. In one hand he clutched the umbrella, in the other an Indian Bradshaw.

"Uncle Dan!" almost shouted his nephew.

"There, my boy! Now, now, don't drag me—don't drag me. Let me get out; give me time. I," as he stood beside his nephew, "thought I would take you by surprise." And he shook his hand vigorously.

"A surprise—I should just think so! How on earth did you ever find your way here? Why did you not write?"

"I'll tell you everything presently—meanwhile, get me something to drink. I don't want lunch—get me a drink; and then walk me about like a horse, for my legs are so stiff with sitting in that infernal chair that I believe I have lost the use of them."

As Mr. Pollitt drank off a whisky and soda, his little eyes wandered round the big dining-room with its faded magnificence, then strayed to the matchless prospect from the open window, and finally rested on his companion.

"Hullo, Mark, my boy! I see that this country has not agreed with you."

"Well, apparently it suits you, Uncle Dan," was the smiling reply. "You are looking very fit, at any rate."

"And how is your father?"

"Rather shaky, I am afraid; he has been ailing for the last week. He is asleep just now."

"Ah, very well, then you can explain me to him when he awakes; and, meanwhile, I have a good many things to explain to you—why I am here, for instance. So take me outside, where I can stretch my legs. There seems to be a great garden hereabouts."

"And now, to begin my story at the beginning," con-

timed Mr. Pollitt, as they paced along side by side, "I got your letter, of course—and of course it upset me terribly. I was like a lunatic, and it did not smooth me down when some one kept saying, 'I told you so; still waters run deep!' and so on. At first I was resolved to cut you adrift, and to take no further notice of you. I was in this mind for a whole fortnight, and then I got another communication that drove me stark mad. I heard through my bankers that you had drawn on me for five thousand pounds. Now you know, Mark," coming to a full stop and holding up a finger, "I have never grudged you money, have I? but to take it like this. Don't interrupt me. I had given Babcock and Bell a quiet notification that I would honour your cheques to an additional small extent, in case, I thought to myself, the boy runs short of a couple of hundred or so—but five thousand! Yes, yes; I know you never had it! Don't interrupt, I tell you; let me go straight on. I wrote out to Bombay at once, asking for particulars, and the answer came back, 'That Mr. Jervis had drawn the money personally, in notes and gold, and had sailed for Australia—with a lady.'"

"Sailed for Australia with a lady!" repeated Mark, now halting in his turn on the gravel walk.

"Yes. At first I thought I saw the whole thing as clear as print. Your letter was a ruse to gain time. You knew I was dead against your engagement to Miss Gordon, that I wanted you to come home, so you had just taken the matter into your own hands, helped yourself to what would start you fairly well, married the girl, and emigrated to the colonies. I kept this idea to myself, I am now most thankful to say, and I worried and worried over the business night and day. The whole affair was unlike you; but it was not very unlike Clarence. And where was Clarence? I thought of writing and making more inquiries—indeed, the sheet of paper

was actually before me—when I suddenly said, 'Why should not I go out myself, instead of twopence-half-penny worth of paper?' Mrs. Pollitt was away at Hamburg, I was alone, and, to tell you the truth, had no heart for shooting or anything. To put the matter in a nutshell, instead of writing I went straight off to the P. and O. office and booked my passage to Bombay by the following mail. I thought I would just go out quietly and see for myself how the land lay. I came out the end of August. Phew! I feel hot now, when I think of those days in the Red Sea—a blazing sun, an iron steamer. I was like a lobster in a fish-kettle! Needless to say, there were no lords or dukes on board; but I travelled with what suited me *better*—an uncommonly clever lawyer chap, who lives in Bombay, and put me up to everything. We became great cronies, and as we smoked together a good bit, I told him the whole of my affairs, and placed myself unreservedly in his hands; and for once in my life I did a wise thing. He wanted me to stay with him, but I put up at an hotel. However, he rigged me out, engaged a first-class Goanese servant for me, who speaks English, and takes me entirely in charge, just as if I was a baby, and he set about ferreting out the cheque business. I saw the cheque—it was your signature, sure enough; but the writing of 'five thousand pounds' was another hand—Clarence's. I discovered that he had passed off as you. His photograph was identified at the bank. I could not hear anything about the lady; but she was entered in the passenger list for Melbourne as 'Mrs. Jervis.' So Exit Waring—and a nice child's guide *he* has proved!"

"That is not all," burst out Mark. "He owes money all over the place! I gave him the command of all our funds, and he squandered every penny."

"Serve you jolly well right," returned his uncle with emphasis.



"Yes; it certainly did. I also gave him a cheque for five hundred to pay off everything the day I left Shirani. I was so bothered, that I conclude that I never filled in the cheque properly."

"Evidently not, and your little oversight cost me four thousand five hundred pounds. Well, never mind that now. I heard pretty stories of Clarence at the hotel—people talking at the table beside me; how he had gambled, betted, and played the deuce, and made a regular cat's-paw of the young fool he was travelling with, meaning you—an undeniable fact. I then, having finished off Waring, came straight away to look you up, Master Mark. Pedro, that's my fellow, took great care of me, and I have had as many adventures as would fill a volume of *Punch*. I travelled in comfort as long as I was on the rail, bar the boat; but once the rail came to an end, and I had to take to a box—I am too old to begin riding—I was uncommonly sorry for myself. However, everything I saw was new and interesting, the scenery splendid; I came *via* Shirani, of course, and I broke my journey at the Brandes—Sir Pelham and Lady Brande. By the way, you never told me that he had a handle to his name! Eh, how was that?"

"And how came you to know the Brandes?" asked his nephew, gravely.

"Ah, that is another story! And how came you to tell Sir Pelham that there was insanity in the Jervis family, eh?"

"Because it is true. And I only heard it since I came here. My grandfather died in Richmond lunatic asylum, my uncle jumped overboard at sea, my father has now, thank God, a lucid interval, but he has been insane for years."

"*Idea*, every one of them!" blazed out Mr. Pollitt.

"Uncle Dan, what do you mean?" demanded Jervis, with trembling lips and a pair of sternly searching eyes.

"I know the Jervis family; why, man, I made it my business to study it up. Your grandfather, a splendid old soldier, died at Richmond in his own house, as sane as I am—sane, indeed, for I've been near losing my senses several times of late. Your uncle, noble fellow, jumped overboard to save life and lost his own. Your father's head was cracked by a fall. Who told you this other balderdash?"

"Fernandez, my father's heir. He was informed by Mrs. Jervis, my late step-mother. And is it all true what you tell me?"

"As true as I am a living man and sinner. Your father, no doubt, believed every one of his people to be lunatics, a phase of his own delusions."

"Uncle Dan," broke in his nephew, "I don't think you can ever realize what you have done for me. You have restored me—to life—to hope. That was the reason why I gave up Miss Gordon."

"And she is staunch to you still," nodding his head emphatically.

"How on earth do you know?"

"Oh, I know a good deal, considering that I have only been a fortnight in the country! Mark, my dear boy, I see that all this sudden news is too much for you."

"Go on—go on," cried the other, white with excitement; "such news is never too much for any one."

"Well, you know, I came up by that maddening, twisting cart road—I began to think it had no ending, like eternity. You recollect the fountains, every few miles? At one of them, my fellows stopped to drink and smoke, and there was a lady watering her horse—a remarkably handsome girl, riding a fine black Arab. She had a white puppy on her knee. She looked so pleasant that though, as you know, I'm a shy man, I ventured to speak to her, and asked her if the road led to any place, short of China? or if she had ever heard of Shirani?"

Yes, she lived there; and it was just four miles further. We fell into talk, we were going the same way—her horse would not stand the puppy at any price, but reared, and flung about like a mad thing. She sat him splendidly, I will say, and held on to the dog like grim death, she said he was tired—and the long and the short of it was, that I took the pup in the dandy, and of all the nasty fidgeting little brutes!—but that girl has such beautiful eyes—I could do anything for her. And I'd like to see the man that could resist her! I told her my name, and said I had come out after my nephew, and asked her if she had ever heard of him—his name was Jervis. She immediately became bright scarlet, I do assure you, and said 'Yes.' I ventured to inquire her name. She said it was Gordon; and when I replied, 'I have heard of you,' she grew, if possible, still redder. We became as thick as thieves in no time. I got out and walked beside her, actually carrying the pup—for he would not sit in the dandy alone—and she told me a lot about the hill folk, and the mountain peaks, and taught me a few words of Hindustani. I inquired about an hotel, and she declared that there was none, and I must come to her uncle's; he and her aunt would be very glad to see me, for Mr. Jervis was a particular friend of theirs. And is he not a particular friend of yours too? I asked as pointedly as I knew how. And she looked me straight in the face, and said 'Yes.' I stayed with the Brandes, to make a long story short, and I was delighted with my visit. I now know what people mean when they talk of Indian hospitality and Indian friends. I believe I am getting quite attached to the country!"

"Then you had better remain out here, Uncle Dan, and live with me."

"A case of Mahomet and the mountain, eh? No, no, my boy; I mean to fetch you home. I cannot spare you. At my age it is impossible to throw out new roots."

"And about Miss Gordon?" urged his listener impatiently.

"Honor, you mean. She was charming. She may have wished to turn my poor silly old head, and she succeeded. She played the violin—that settled me. Yesterday morning, before I left, she and I were walking in the garden quite early, and she picked me a button-hole; and I said, 'I'm off now to see my boy, will you give me a flower for him, and have you any message?' She made no answer for a full minute; so, to put her at ease, I said, 'I know all about it, my dear. I was angry to think that he could leave me; but what was that to leaving you!' 'He did what was right,' she said, firing up like a sky-rocket. When we had made peace again, she chose a flower with most particular care, and said with a face as red as the rose, 'You may give him that, with my love.' 'Certainly,' I said; 'but the carriage must be prepaid.' At first she did not understand."

"And I must confess that I am equally at sea," admitted his companion.

"Why, you young donkey, of course I made her give me a kiss."

"Which is more than she has ever given me. Uncle Dan, you are an extraordinarily able man. No wonder you made a great fortune! You have brought me nothing but good news—my head feels reeling—I can hardly grasp it all at once."

"Well, my dear boy, I am glad of it. For it seems to me that you and good news have been strangers for many a long day! And now, suppose we go in, and find out if your father is awake?"

CHAPTER XLV.

ONLY MR. JERVIS.

"I NEVER saw such a change in any one!" faltered Mr. Pollitt, with some emotion, as he followed Mark out of his father's room. "He is years younger than I am, and he is so cadaverous and shrunken that he looks seventy at the very least. Poor fellow! he was in a desperate state at first, when he thought I had come to carry you off. I am glad you reassured him so completely. Well, as long as he is here, he shall have you. I understand matters now; I have seen with my own eyes, and one look is worth a ton of letters."

Mr. Pollitt was enchanted with his present quarters, with the great rambling house, its gardens, its situation, its quaint furniture. The solitude and silence were an extraordinary refreshment to the little world-worn cook-mey, after the roar of the London traffic, the throbbing of engines, and the rumbling of railway carriages.

In honour of the new arrival, the khansamah sent up a remarkably well-cooked dinner, not at all a jungle menu. There was excellent soup, fresh fish from a mountain "tal" (a lake), *entrées*, a brace of hill partridges, sweets, yellow cream, fruit, and black coffee. The claret was a still further agreeable surprise; it had been laid in by a connoisseur, and imported direct from Bordeaux *via* Pondicherry. But the greatest surprise of all was presented in the person of the host himself. With his heart warmed by sound old wine and the presence of a sound old friend, Major Jervis kindled up into a semblance of what he once had been. He talked connect-edly and even brilliantly; he laughed and joked, and

listened with unaffected delight to the history of Mr. Pollitt's journey and adventures *en route*. His eyes shone with something of their ancient fire; the lines and wrinkles seemed to fade from his face; his voice was that of a man who could still make himself heard on parade. Mr. Pollitt gazed and hearkened in blank amazement; he was entranced and carried away breathless by chronicles of hairbreadth escapes, tiger shooting, and elephant catching, by tales of Eastern superstitions, of lucky and unlucky horses, places, and people, stories of native life; of an English nobleman who lived in a bazaar, earning his bread by repairing carts and ekkas; of a young officer of good family and fortune, who had lost his heart about a native girl, and abandoned his country, profession, and religion, and had adopted her people and embraced her faith; how, in vain, his wealthy English relatives had besought him to return to them; how they had come out to seek him—had argued and implored, and finally prevailed on him to abandon his associates; and how, ere they had reached Bombay, they had lost him. He, unable to break the spell of the siren, had escaped back to his old haunts. He told of Englishmen who were lepers, living in sad solitude among the hills, unknown and nameless; of the burning of witches, of devil-worship, black magic, and human sacrifices. The most thrilling and extraordinary items of his past were unrolled as a scroll, and recapitulated in vivid and forcible language.

Who was this that held them spellbound? thought his listeners. Not the shattered wreck of the forenoon, but the soldier who had seen much service, who had felt the pulse of events, who had absorbed India through his eyes and ears—*real* India—during a residence of thirty-five years in that mysterious, intoxicating, gorgeous land! Of frontier skirmishes, kept out of the newspapers, of friendly interchanges between foes in the field,

of mysterious disappearances, of men who had laid down their lives for their country—heroes unknown to fame, whose deeds were unrecorded by one line of print, whose shallow graves were marked by rotting crosses on the bleak Afghan frontier.

Major Jervis kept his audience enthralled; even Mark's attention rarely wandered to a coolie who was at the moment running through the wooded hillsides by the light of the cold, keen stars, with a letter in his loin-cloth addressed to "Miss Gordon."

It was one o'clock before the party dispersed; and as Major Jervis clapped his brother-in-law on the shoulder, with a hearty good-night, he added:

"Who knows, Pollitt, but that I may be persuaded by your eloquence to go home with you, after all?"

* * * * *

"My father is very ill," said Mark, as he entered into his uncle's room at eight o'clock the next morning. "He wants to see you. I have been with him since six o'clock; and, Uncle Dan, I am afraid that this is the end."

Yes, there was no doubt about that, thought Mr. Pollitt; death was surely written on the countenance that was turned to him. Last night had been the final flicker before the flame of life went out.

The invalid was propped up in a chair by a window looking towards the snows; but his face was ghastly, his breathing laboured.

"I'm glad you are here, Dan; glad we met once more." And he made a movement as if he would offer his wasted, helpless-looking hand. "You and Mark wanted me to go home," murmured the grey lips; "and I am going—sooner than you thought." He turned his dull eyes and fixed them intently on his son. "God bless you, Mark," he whispered almost inarticulately. These were his last words.

When Mr. Burgess arrived, an hour later, he was dead.

"Died of a failure of the heart's action, brought on by some overpowering excitement;" but, as far as he could judge, "under any circumstances he could not have outlived a week." Such was the missionary's verdict.

"Ah, Sahib!" cried Mahomed, with upraised hands and eyes, "I knew how it would be; there was the warning, the never-failing warning, at twelve o'clock last night—the voice."

"What do you mean, Jan Mahomed?" Jervis returned quickly.

"The voice of a stranger, Sahib, shouting in the yard. He was calling for his horse. He was going a long journey. Surely the Protector of the poor knows the truth of this? It is ever thus before a man's death—there is an order loudly spoken, 'Gorah tiar bye!' ("Bring my horse!")"

Major Jervis was laid in the cantonment cemetery the following morning. Mr. Burgess read the funeral service. Mark, Mr. Pollitt, and one or two neighbours assembled round the grave, whilst afar off stood servants, coolies, and many sick and poor, to whom the "dearly beloved brother," now being laid to rest, had been a kind and generous friend.

Fernandez arrived in answer to a telegram, full of joy, bustle, and importance; he could not understand the faces of the two Englishmen. It was, as he frankly stated, a happy release. He delighted in organization, change, and excitement, and undertook all arrangements with zeal. He seemed to be everywhere at once. He talked, strutted, gesticulated, and made such a stir that it seemed as if ten men had been added to the party.

"The house and land are Mark's," he explained to Mr. Pollitt; "not worth much," shrugging his shoulders. "Everything else comes to me—all the jewels. I wish I could show you those in the bank," and his eyes glittered as he thought of them. "But we will get out what is

here and let you have a look at them, for they are native and very curious."

A big safe was accordingly unlocked, the contents brought forth and poured out, nay, heaped, upon a crimson-covered table, which displayed them to advantage.

Mr. Pollitt sat down deliberately, to examine what evidently represented an immense quantity of money, thus sunk in gold and precious stones. There were aigrettes of diamonds, the jewels dull and badly out, but of extraordinarily great size. There were vases and boxes of gold, and white and green jade inlaid with rubies. Khasdanas, or betel-boxes; jars for otto of roses; crescent ornaments for the turban, set with emeralds and diamonds; gold anklets, with the ends formed of elephant heads; forehead ornaments, set with great pearls with pendant drops; plumes or turahs for turbans, with strings of diamonds; armlets, bangles, rings for nose or ear, back-scratchers of gold and ivory, glorious ropes of pearls, and many huge unset emeralds and rubies. It was the collection and stores of generations, now about to be scattered to the four winds by the plump and restless hand of Fernandez Cardoza.

"I would like to give you something, Mark," he said, carelessly turning over piles of gold and precious stones as he spoke. "Will you accept a present from me, my good fellow?"

"Of course he will," said the little Londoner, with business-like promptitude.

"You joked with me about wearing a—a—necklace, eh, you remember, when I showed you a certain little bit of jewellery?" Fernandez looked conscious, and actually believed that he was blushing. "Well now, I am going to present you with one! Look at this!" holding towards him a string of large emeralds, pierced and run on a silken cord, and fastened off by a gold tassel. "These are for your future bride, Mark my boy."

"How did you know about her?" eyeing him gravely.

"Ho, ho, ho! Not a bad shot, I see! A bow drawn at a venture! Then there is such a young lady?"

"Yes," assented Mr. Pollitt, "and a very handsome young lady; you may take my word for *that*!"

"What is she like?" turning to Mark with sparkling eyes. "Fair or dark?"

"You shall see her some day, Fernandez. You must come to our wedding."

"I shall be most happy; but, my dear fellow, *do* describe her appearance. I am such a ladies' man, you know, such an admirer of beauty."

"Oh, she is tall, a head over you, Cardoza," said Mr. Pollitt, "and has dark hair, dark-grey eyes, and a very delicate colour, the air of a princess."

"Ah! then she shall have these pearls, instead of emeralds!" cried Fernandez with enthusiasm, plunging his fat fingers into ropes of the former, and holding them aloft for inspection. Four rows of large pearls fastened off by a quaint old clasp, and a little tassel of rubies.

"They are far too valuable—it is much too handsome a gift," objected Mark, holding back instinctively.

"Nothing is too handsome for a handsome girl! and, for the matter of value, the emeralds, though they look like so many balls of green glass, beat them! If you refuse them in her name, I assure you I shall be quite affronted; and, surely, it is only right that the major's daughter should have one small gift from amid all the Begum's jewels."

"I do not call that a small gift, Fernandez, and I am very much obliged to you; but I will take it to Miss Gordon, and, later on, she will thank you personally."

"They are superb!" exclaimed Mr. Pollitt, rapturously. "I shall give her diamonds—to correspond."

Incongruous pair though they were, Mr. Pollitt and

Mr. Cardoza hit it off surprisingly well. Fernandez's florid manner, Oriental ideas, and ornamental language interested the hard-headed matter-of-fact little Englishman. They walked and smoked and argued noisily together, whilst Mark rode away to visit a certain newly made grave,—and to take leave of the Persian lady.

"Ah, my friend, I have been waiting for you," she said, rising from the chabootra, or band stand. "I thought you would surely come to say farewell. Of course you are going away?"

"Yea. I am going away immediately."

"And you will marry her—now—and gain your heart's desire?"

"I hope so. And I am come to offer you what may fulfil yours!"

She stared at him with an air of almost fierce inquiry.

"It is the Yellow House. Will you accept it, for your lifetime? You said you wished for a large bungalow in a central position—and there you are!"

"The Yellow House! Oh, it is too much. No, I could not take it, not even for my poor. No, no, no!" and she shook her head with an air of decision.

"Why not?" he argued; "it is mine to do with as I will; and there is nothing that will give me greater pleasure than to feel that it is in your hands—and the means of doing good—instead of standing closed, empty, and falling into ruins. There is the garden for the patients to walk in, the grazing for cows, the big rooms for wards. I will thankfully pay an apothecary and assistant, and whatever is necessary."

"You wish to establish a sort of hill hospital for the poor in these parts?" inquired the Persian incredulously.

"Nay; you have already done that. I only ask leave to help you. If you will not accept the *Pela Kothi*

from me, take it from—us both—or from Honor. You will not refuse her!"

"And shall I never see you again—or her?" she faltered.

"Who can say? Perhaps one day we may come and visit you. At any rate, she will write to you."

"But how can she write to me—a—Persian woman?" looking at him with an intensity that was not pleasant to contemplate.

"At least I shall write to you," he rejoined, slightly disconcerted. "I will send you a certain yearly sum to spend on the wretched lepers, and in any charitable form that you may think best. Mr. Burgess will translate my letters for you, and also any answers that you may be good enough to send me. We do not wish to lose sight of you, if we can help it."

"We—how soon you have learnt to say it! You are so happy, where you have hitherto known great misery, and the poor native woman will soon have passed from your mind. You are released. I shall never be released—but by death. You will be in another world—you and the Miss Sahib! Will you give her this from me? It is a little charm. Nay, do not laugh. What am I but an ignorant, superstitious native? Nevertheless, I mean well. This is an amulet against sickness, poverty, or the loss of friends; an old hill woman gave it to me. She said it never failed. I have no friends to lose, but I am a stranger to poverty and sickness."

"I will give it to her to-morrow," taking from her hand a smooth dark-green stone, about the size of a filbert. "As to having no friends, may Miss Gordon and I not call ourselves your friends?"

"How can an English lady, and an English sahib, be the friends of—a woman of my people?" she inquired, with a face as expressionless as a mask.

"It shall be as you will," he answered gravely.

"But I see nothing to stand between us. Remember that we wish to be your friends, if you will have us. And now I'm afraid I must go."

He saw her lips quiver, as she suddenly turned away her face, and dismissed him with a quick imperious gesture.

Ere he left the valley he looked back once. The Persian was standing precisely where he had left her. In answer to his farewell signal, she waved a handkerchief—and thus involuntarily betrayed herself. It was the action of an Englishwoman!

* * * * *

Mr. Pollitt was actually reluctant to abandon this life of pastoral simplicity. The fragrant garden, the clear exhilarating air, the sturdy simple hill folk, the view of hill and plains, steeped in a blue or violet haze, appeared to hold him fast. He and Fernandez agreed to travel together in a leisurely comfortable fashion; but Mark would not and could not wait. He was in love. Where love exists, it is the only thing in life—all else is nothing. He laid a dak of his three ponies on the road, and, early one afternoon, galloped off to Shirani, with two wedding presents in his pocket.

* * * * *

Perhaps the grey and bay ponies were as anxious as their rider to return to their former haunts; at any rate, the forty miles which lay between the Pela Kothi and Rookwood were accomplished at a pace that has never yet been approached, and as the result of this rapid travelling, Mark Jervis arrived a considerable time before he was expected. That evening Lady Brande had been entertaining a dinner-party, one of her most superior "burra khanaa." People had left the table and were assembled in the drawing-room, where it was generally noted that Miss Gordon was looking brilliantly handsome. Yes, she had entirely recovered her looks. A

few months ago she had gone off most terribly; but that queer hushed-up love affair of hers had been quite enough to blanch her face and waste away her flesh. Some one was at the piano singing a penetrating Italian love song, when it became evident that an exceedingly late guest was on the point of arrival. There was the flash of a lantern outside, the stamping of ponies' hoofs, and the sound of a manly voice that set Honor's heart beating.

Sir Pelham slipped away for a moment, and then returned and glanced significantly at his wife.

She rose at once, and hurried out of the room, and was seen through the open verandah in animated conversation with a young fellow in riding dress. Etiquette forbade Honor—the most concerned—to move. Propriety chained her hand and foot.

"I hope you will excuse me," panted Lady Brande, returning somewhat breathless, and addressing her guests, in a voice between laughing and crying. "He declares that he is not fit to appear. He has just come back.—It is only Mr. Jervis!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

A WEDDING WITH TWO CAKES.

THE following is a portion of a letter from a lady in Shirani, to her dearest friend on the plains:—

"It is true that you have the hideous journey over, all the packing, getting off of carts, paying farewell calls, and nasty little bills, and that you are settled on the plains in winter quarters—all this misery is before me. Nevertheless I think you took up your winter

quarters prematurely. October is quite my month in the hills, the air is so crisp and clear, you can see for miles, the Autumn tints are exquisite, and the low country seems veiled in a wash of the most exquisite cobalt and amethyst tints.

"Moreover, I have been here for the wedding. You want to know all about it, of course, and I will do as I would be done by, and begin at the very beginning. When young Jervis unexpectedly returned, every one was quite vulgarly astounded. The explanation of his absence was perfectly simple, and he brought in his train his uncle—the rich man—the real, true, and only millionaire! And of course they stayed at Rookwood, and Miss Gordon's engagement was given out at once—I must say the pair looked delightfully happy. I used to meet them riding about the pine roads; they also came down to the club, and tennis, and actually behaved like reasonable people, and a great deal less like lovers (in public), than other couples who were not engaged. Lady Brande was simply one large smile whenever you saw her, and indeed she and the withered little millionaire were preposterously radiant. He was delighted with everything he saw. (A complete contrast to some of our visitors from home.) Among other things, he appears to be particularly pleased with his future niece; I have noticed them constantly together—in fact, I think he monopolised her rather more than was fair. Lady Brande and the nephew have always been *au mieux*! At first there was an awful rumour that owing to a recent affliction in the bridegroom's family—the death of his father—the wedding was to be very quiet—bride to be married in her habit, and to go away from the church. But, after all, a compromise was effected—in deference to Lady Brande's wishes. There was to be no band, no grand breakfast, no fuss—in deference to the young man's wishes; but the bride was to have an orthodox

white gown, and any one who pleased might come to the church and see them married, and afterwards adjourn to Rookwood for cake and champagne. Needless to tell you that every one pleased to attend the only wedding of the season, and a wedding that had an air of romance about it, and was certainly a love match. The presents were really tokens of good-will—not given for show—and were 'numerous and costly,' as they say in the papers; the handsomest, in my opinion, was a splendid necklace of rows of pearls, most quaint. One of the smallest was a button-hook from Mrs. Langrishe. I don't know how she can be so mean! I believe she was very urgent in pressing Lady Brande to take some of her preparations for that other wedding off her hands. And Lady B., who is the soul of good nature, was forced into purchasing the wedding cake, never unpacked—she had a superb one, of course, from Pelitis; but this she bought as a supplementary affair for cutting up afterwards and sending away.

"Sweet Primrose and Dolly Merton were the little bridesmaids; and as the former insisted on having 'a gentleman to walk with,' Mrs. Paul's two handsome boys, in white page suits, accompanied the pair of small maids. They made the prettiest quartette—Dolly and Sweet in such smart frocks, Sweet looking really like a young angel, with her golden hair. However, she came out in her true colours before the end of the day. I wondered that she was invited to be present in any form, but Miss Gordon said that Mr. Jervis particularly wished it. There is no accounting for tastes—of course he does not know her. I declare to you that child strutted up the aisle, in her white silk shoes and stockings, as if she were spurning criticism, and as if the whole packed church full of people were assembled solely to gaze at Sweet Primrose! There were several outsiders present—friends the bridegroom had picked up, two or three young

planters, whose hair wanted cutting badly, a missionary with an immense brown beard, who took part in the ceremony, that funny Mr. Cardoza, who seemed all teeth and diamond rings. The bride wore a lovely plain white satin and *the pearls*. She was rather nervous; but the bridegroom was perfectly composed. They looked so triumphantly happy coming down the aisle arm-in-arm. After all, there is nothing like a love match!

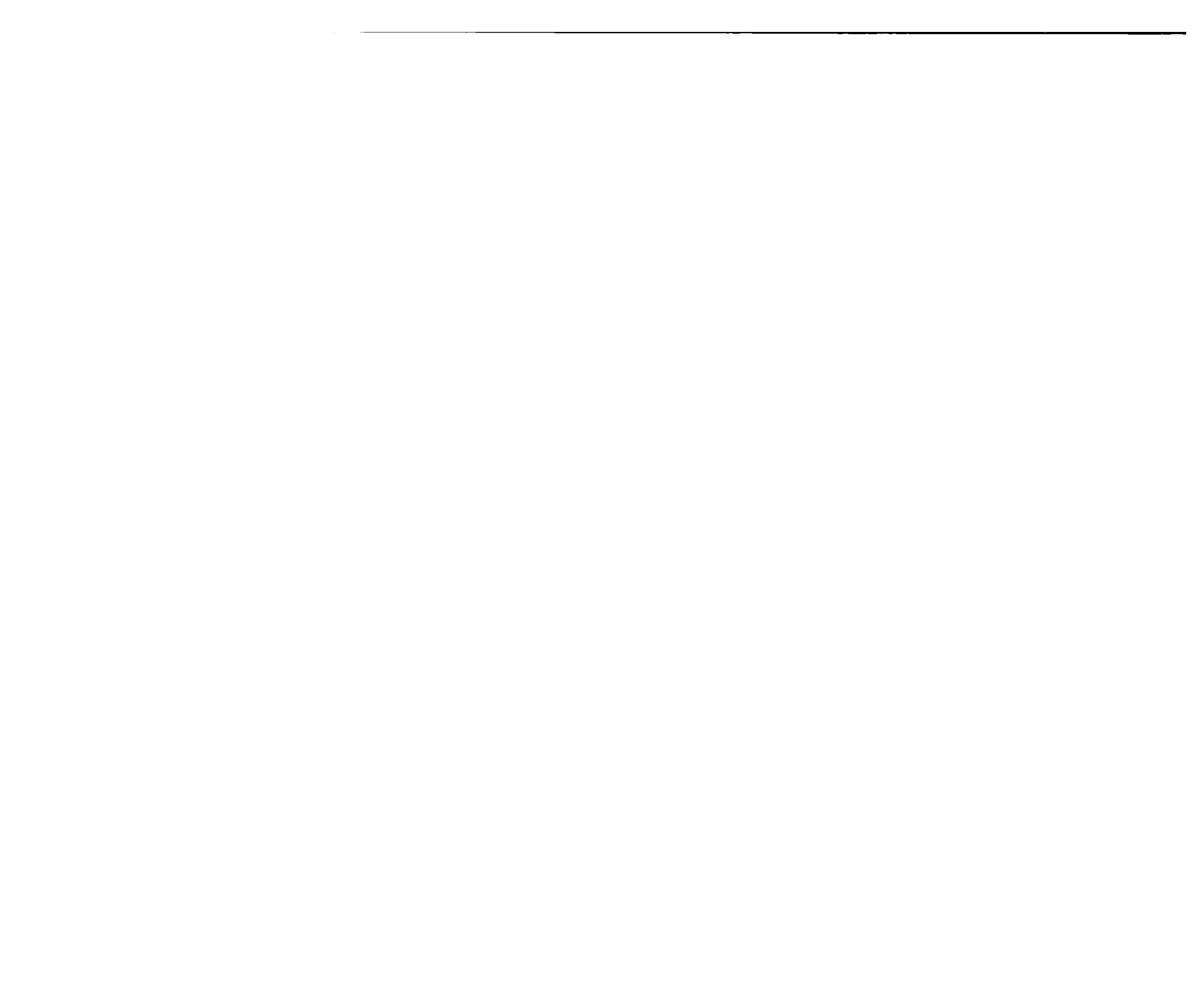
"We assembled in immense force at Rookwood, to drink the health of the newly-married couple. Sir Pelham made a capital speech—neat, brief, and witty. There were one or two unofficial remarks which may be recorded; for example, Colonel Sladen said, 'She came up with him—a case of the early bird. The first day she was brought to the club I gave her a piece of sound advice—I told her to keep her eye on the millionaire. Though I had got hold of the wrong end of the stick, it appears that she had *not*!'

"But it was generally acknowledged that Sweet Primrose made *the* speech of the occasion! Fortunately it was to a comparatively small audience. As she sat stuffing herself with almond paste, she suddenly announced, in that shrill little pipe of hers, '*This is Miss Paske's wedding-cake!*' And Mrs. Langrishe, who was sitting close by, looked as if she was about to faint, and no wonder. Of course it was not Miss Paske's wedding-cake; but the prying elf, who had been to Rookwood the previous day, whilst her mother was examining the presents, had overheard certain whisperings, and, having a particular eye for *cake*, had noted cake number two. Mrs. Sladen almost threw herself on the child, and managed to silence her and stifle her terrible tongue; but I believe the imp actually exacted a solemn promise that she was to have a large sample of what she pleasantly called '*the other end*' at the very earliest opportunity.

"None of this by-play came to the eyes or ears of the

wedding party, and soon we were all on the *qui vive* to speed the bride. There was a great deal of kissing, but no tears. The happy pair were accompanied by a white dog, and drove off (quite a new departure) in a smart victoria, which was almost buried in slippers. If slippers are any sign of good feeling, they are the most popular couple that were married here for years. I don't believe that there is one single old shoe to be found in the whole of Shirani."

THE END.



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